OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

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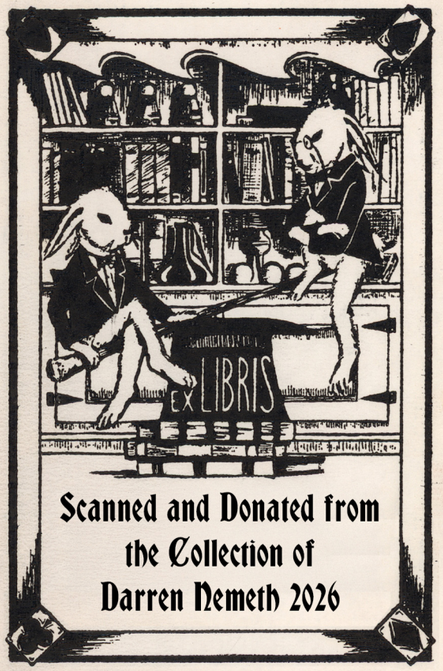
by
"OLD
SLEUTH"



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OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

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The Beautiful Mystery of Paris

By

"OLD SLEUTH."

Being the sequel to Old Sleuth Weekly No. 53
entitled

"OLD IRONSIDES" IN FRANCE

CHAPTER LI.

"I AM ready to listen to anything you may tell me."

"We have promised you a large reward!"

"Yes."

"Aid us to a success and your reward shall be doubled; if we fail, we will be too poor to pay you one sou."

"Does my reward depend upon your success?" demanded Rideau.

"Yes."

"You did not tell me that."

"We did not consider it necessary, we were so sure of success; but the American has spoiled all our plans."

"How?"

"He has wooed the girl himself."

"And if he wins?"

"He will carry away a fortune of millions!"

"Ah, I see! but the American can not be removed by an arrest; to arrest him would be child's play."

"If he were out of the way, only for a season, we could carry through our game."

"There is something in that, but you must remember that an arrest would lead to an exposure. France is a republic; the press is free; popular sentiment might be aroused, and light set in on the whole business!"

"We must win some way."

"I will aid you."

"Enough. Listen. If we win, your reward shall be three times the sum first named."

Rideau's eyes sparkled; it was a great deal of money that had been promised him.

"Why do you not run the American to a quarrel?"

"We had him in that position when you interfered."

"As an officer, I was bound to do so. I would be compelled to do so again; it must be done when I am not near."

"Ah, I understand!"

"I will meet you after daylight."

It was well on toward daylight when the detective spoke.

The two men separated, and in the meantime Ned hastened on to the Pont Royal, the famous bridge over the Seine, built at the command of Napoleon I.

Peter awaited our hero.

"Why did you tell me to meet you here?"

"Where should I have met you?"

"At the home of my mistress."

"Tell me how you chanced to fall into the power of the Corsicans?"

"I was at their house watching them, and I was discovered."

"By whom?"

"François."

"Do you know the man Ricetti?"

"Yes."

"A bad fellow?"

"A real villain, an outlaw, a brigand."

"Your mistress is in that man's power!"

"My mistress in that man's power?"

"Yes."

"Then all is over! She is dead!"

Ned told the Indian all that had occurred. The man betrayed great emotion, and, in an agitated tone, said:

"It is all over; the Corsicans have won."

"Your mistress is not dead."

"They will kill her the moment she is placed in their power! Come, come, we must hasten!"

"Ricetti will not deliver his prize over to his employers."

"Why not?"

"He would make her his own bride."

"She wed that scoundrel!"

"She will not."

"We must act quickly."

"Do you know the man's habits?"

"Ricetti?"

"Yes."

"His habits are like those of any other rascal."

"Do you know his possible haunts?"

"He will be found somewhere in the purlieus if found at all."

"Meet me here two hours from now. In the meantime go and place your mistress's effects under the care of the police."

"Would not the latter prove a dangerous proceeding?"

"No. Tell them your mistress has disappeared. The police will search for her as well as ourselves."

The two men separated.

Ned proceeded to keep his appointment with Rideau.

It was almost day-break when he entered the apartments where the strange duel had taken place.

It had been an eventful night. Within a few hours events had transpired which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been the incidents of months.

Our hero found the French detective awaiting him.

"You did it well?" said Rideau.

"I did. I generally do."
"I named a meeting with you as a friend."
"Thank you."
"I am here to tell you that you must leave Paris."
"When?"
"Within a few hours."
"Why this advice?"
"You have been identified."
"Well?"
"They will capture you."
"Well?"
"Can you afford to become a prisoner?"
"I can."
"You do not understand law in France?"
"I have an idea that justice can be obtained here, if one knew how to go to work to secure it. I would not care much if I were arrested to-morrow."
"To-day?"
"Nor to-day."
"I am your friend."
"Thank you."
"As a friend, not as an officer, I give you the advice."
"I can not accept your advice."
"In giving you the advice, I discharge a friend's part. When I leave here, I work against you."
"I can not help it."
"I give you the opportunity to know it."
"I am satisfied."
"You fully understand my position?"
"I do."
"I can not do again what I did to-night."
"I do not know that you did me a service."
"I saved your life."
"I beg your pardon, you saved the life of your clients; you know that I know it."
"I shall still claim that I saved yours. It was three to one."
"All right; but had you permitted me to proceed, we would have reversed the laws of arithmetic. It would have been three from one, and one remain."
"You are a very confident man."
"I am."
"You deserve a better fate than the one you would invite."
"I will take my chances."
"I will reveal a secret to you. Ten men have sworn away your life."
Old Ironsides merely laughed. The revelation was no scare.

CHAPTER LII.

"You do not fear?" said Rideau.
"I am like you, a detective. I have lived amidst threats all my life. I never turn aside from a purpose because my life is threatened."
Rideau was compelled to admire the detective; the reply was the same as he would have made himself under similar circumstances.
"I hope you may win against your foes."
"Thank you."
"I would, however, have you understand that circumstances compel me to work against you. I would not seek your life. I would protect you were you in danger, but I have done my duty in warning you; your enemies have not yet brought themselves within the pale of the law."
In English, Ned remarked, in a low tone:
"They will bring themselves within some cemetery palings before they get through with me."
Rideau fixed a peculiar glance upon our hero, and Ned knew that the French detective spoke English.
Rideau had not previously revealed the fact. He was not aware at the moment that he had done so.
A knowledge of different languages is an essential accomplishment to a first-class detective; and the facilities to acquire the knowledge are so excellent it is strange that it is not made a necessity.
Ned, when alone, thought over calmly the result of his interview with the French detective. Rideau's purpose was plainly revealed; the man had a sense of honor which prompted him to warn the American and let him know that there were considerations which made him a friend of the Corsicaas.
Ned did not deem it necessary to let Rideau knew that Emily Salabert was missing and in the power of the man Ricetti.
It was daylight. Ned proceeded to his lodgings, and without thought of rest, changed his apparel, adopted a new disguise, and once more appeared upon the street.
It was early morning as he strolled along the Rue de la Paix toward the Place Vendôme, where stands the celebrated column erected at the command of Napoleon I. to commemorate his victories.
On every hand, in Paris, amidst all its other historic associations, can be seen columns and statues commemorative of Napoleon's former glory.
It was at the railing surrounding the Column Vendôme that Ned was to meet the Indian, Peter.
The man was on hand.
"I have made a discovery," said the good fellow, his dark face all aglow.
"What have you discovered?"
"I met a friend of Ricetti.'
"And you followed him?"
"I did."
"Good! We are on the track of our man, I hope!"
About one of the worst quarters in Paris is the locality lying near the entrance to the Père La Chaise, the great Parisian cemetery.
It was from this quarter that a large portion of the mob which swelled the blood-thirsty ranks of the Commune came. As a Frenchman told the writer, he would not go through that quarter at night, just once, in fine clothes, for all the wealth in Paris.
The vicinity is redolent of blood and crime, and, strangely enough, right here, opposite the Prison de la Roquette, is the place where the public executions take place.
It is in this prison where condemned prisoners are confined, and the poor wretches who are to be guillotined are led just out of its gates upon the street, the Rue de la Roquette, where they are executed openly in the presence of as many people as choose to witness the terrible scene.
No passes are required; all one has to do is, get up early in the morning, like American lads on the Fourth of July.
The neighborhood lying all around has been the scene of many tragic events; indeed, the atmosphere, allegorically speaking, fairly reeks with blood; and here to-day, in dark alleys and darker passages, dwell some of the most dangerous criminals in all Europe.
They are not only Frenchmen, but here are gathered refugees, criminal refugees, from all parts of the continent.
It was here, in the quarter we have sought to indicate, that one of the most tragic events of modern history occurred.
On the 24th of May, 1871, but a few years back, the venerable Archbishop of Paris and five other good men were shot in cold blood; and a few days later thirty-seven other innocent men were slaughtered by the mad mob.
We have particularly described the above neighborhood, as it became the scene of Old Ironsides' most daring exploits.
"Where did you follow the man to, Peter?" asked Ned.
"To the worst quarter of Paris."
"And that is—"
"The quarter lying adjacent to the Rue de la Roquette."
Ned had heard of the place, and he remarked:
"A bad spot."
"A spot where we can meet all the worst criminals in Paris!"
"We must make up if we go there."
"Yes."
"You are good at disguises?"
"I am."
"How will you make up?"
"As a fish-woman."
"Good! Go and prepare yourself. I will meet you here to-night."
"Can we afford to wait until to-night?"
"We will have a better chance. I am satisfied that we will have a nice game to play."
"Where shall we meet?"
"At the Tower of Saint-Jacques."
The latter is all that remains of an old church that once stood on the ground which has since been converted into a small park.
It was nine o'clock in the evening when a rough, beggarly looking man shuffled up to the Tower of Saint-Jacques.
A few moments passed, and the beggarly looking man was joined by a stout market-woman.
The latter said:
"I would not have known you had you not given me the sign."
"So much the better."
"Shall we go together?"
"Yes, until you have pointed out to me the place where you saw the brigand enter."
"And then?"
"You must just lay low and wait for signals."
"Hist!" suddenly exclaimed the market-woman, and she pointed to the figure of a man who was passing.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE beggarly looking man glanced in the direction indicated, and in a low tone said:
"François Salabert."
"The same."
"We are on the right track."
"We are."
"Leave me, but follow; *yonder goes my guide!*"
Ned was well got up. He was about as perfect a specimen of a French "ne'er-do-well" as was ever seen wandering around the streets of Paris.
François Salabert proceeded along to the Rue de la Roquette, where he entered one of the thousands of low drinking-places of Paris.
In America, the place would be called a low "gin mill;" in Paris, it was designated a *café*. They are all *cafés* in Paris, but more bad rum than coffee is sold in them.
Ned waited a few moments, and shambled into the place.
François Salabert was seated at a table, and before him stood a bottle of wine.
There were at least half a dozen dirty-looking, swarthy-faced men in the saloon.
Travelers passing through Paris, and only visiting the great boulevards, do not recognize the fact that there is a squalor to be seen there that is not outdone in dirt and filth and wretchedness in the greater city of London.
Transient visitors pass through Paris and go away, impressed with the idea that it is all a bright, beautiful city, where all the houses are clean and the poorest people well-dressed; but we assert that Paris can show, as we have stated, as dirty and miserable a quarter as any city in the world.
The keeper of the so-called *café* was an Italian, a large, powerful man, with a scarred face and black bushy hair and beard.
He was evidently proud to receive a visitor like François: and when the beggarly looking man came shambling in, he rushed forward and rudely attempted to thrust him out into the street.
Ned permitted himself to be pushed, but he dragged the proprietor of the *café* with him, and when on the street, showed the man a bright golden twenty-franc-piece.
That was enough. The beggar could have entered though he had been a mass of running sores.
The proprietor of the place released his hold, and Ned walked away, but in a few moments he returned and entered the place.
At the moment Ned entered, François Salabert was asking a few questions of the proprietor.
"Have you seen Francisco Altinni to-day?"
"I do not know him."
The proprietor spoke quickly. Ned was watching the man, and knew that he lied.
"You do not know Altinni?"
"I do not know him."
"I know him," spoke up Ned.
François fixed his keen eyes on our hero and remained silent.
The proprietor of the place also scowled at the vagabond who had dared speak.
Ned returned both glances unabashed. He was just a cooler any time.
"You say you do not know the man?"
"I never saw him."
"This is the resort of Italians."
"Sometimes."
"Altinni told me to meet him here."
Ned sidled up to François and whispered:
"Ask him if he knows Ricetti?"
Francois gave a start of surprise, and in a low tone, demanded:
"Who are you, fellow?"
"Oh, I am no one. I heard you ask for Altinni; the landlord says he does not know him. I think he lies. I have seen Altinni in here."
"Do you know Altinni?"
"No; I do not call him my friend, but I have seen him in here."
"Why do you tell me to ask for Ricetti?"
"Ask and see."
The proprietor of the place looked very black at the beggar, but he remembered the gold piece, and did nothing rash.
François did not do as he was bid. He drank off his wine and rose to leave the place; as he did so, he motioned to our hero to follow him.
Ned waited and permitted Salabert to pass out, when he stepped forward and paid for his drink.
"You are going?"
"Yes."
"You drove the gentleman from my place by your impudence in speaking to him."
Ned winked in a knowing manner, and said:
"I will bring him or his purse back with me."
The keeper of the *café* understood the meaning of the man's words, and had nothing more to say.
Ned passed out, and on the sidewalk beheld Salabert waiting for him.
"Come with me," said the Corsican.
"Where?"
"In here."
The two men entered an adjoining *café;* one is not compelled to go far in Paris to find a saloon to enter.
The two men sat down at a table, and Salabert ordered the wine.
"Do you know Altinni, fellow?"
"I told you once, no."
"Then why did you pretend to know him?"
"I did not pretend to know him."
"Why did you bid me ask for Ricetti?"
"Because the proprietor lied to you."
"Lied to me?"
"Yes."
"Why should he lie to me?"
"I do not know."
"Then how do you know that he did lie?"
"I told you I have seen Altinni in that place. Altinni is an Italian. He would not be in there unless he knew him."
"You have something to tell me?"
"Oh, no."
Ned's "Oh, no" plainly meant "Oh, yes."
"Would you like to earn some money?"
"Yes, always."
"You can."
"How?"
"Tell me what you know."
"Are you a friend of the handsome young lady?"
François leaped from his seat. He placed his hand on Ned's shoulder and in a loud tone demanded:
"Tell me just what you mean."
"Speak low," said Ned, "the people in the place are looking at you."
Ned's caution was timely, François had spoken in a moment of involuntary surprise.
"I thought you came to inquire about the young lady, that is the reason I followed you into the place, and that is the reason the man wanted to keep me out."
"What young lady are you talking about?"
"Are you a detective?"
"No."
"You say I can make some money?"
"Yes."
"How much?" came the question, in a matter-of-fact tone.

CHAPTER LIV.

NED was playing a deep game; his very boldness was most admirable.
"I will pay according to the value of any information I may receive," was the guarded answer of Salabert.
The detective was driving his man to the position where he wanted him.
"You are seeking Ricetti?"
"I have not said so, fellow."
"It is not necessary for you to say so; you asked for Altinni; when you seek Altinni, you seek Ricetti!"
Ned was working on a suspicion.
"You spoke about a young lady?"
"I asked you if you were seeking a young lady!"
"I am not."
"Then I have no information for you," said Ned, abruptly.
François eyed Ned sharply.
The detective stood the measurement without flinching. He knew just how well he was got up, and felt that he could trust his disguise.
"You need money?"
"No, I have plenty of money. I do not need it. Still, I sell my information."
"How did you get your information?"
"That is my business."
"You are a saucy and impertinent fellow."
"It is not impertinence for one to mind his own business."
"You are not minding your own business; you are prying into mine."
"Very well; I will go away. I thought I might be of service to you, but you need no service; I will go."
"I need some information."
"About the young lady?"
"No."
"About whom?"
"Altinni."
"I can give you none."
"Can you give me some information about Ricetti?"
"I might."
"Do so."
"I must be paid."
"You shall be."
"How much?"
"I told you once—according to the value of your information."
"Well, you wish to hear about Ricetti?"
"Yes."
"The Italian brigand?"
"Is he a brigand?"
"When he is in liquor he admits that he is Ricetti, the outlaw."
"Very well, what do you know about him?"
"Ricetti was employed *to do away with a young lady!*"
François Salabert turned pale, and in a quick tone demanded:
"How is it, fellow, you know so much concerning the business of others?"
"Shall I tell you?"
"Yes."
"I am a vagrant. I lay around to drink. No one minds a poor wretch like me; but I was not always a poor wretch, and when I am not drunk I am deep and cunning; and when I learn revelations I remember them, and when the time comes I use my information to get money to pay for my wine. I am a luxurious beggar; I love wine and good living."
"Why do you not get some good clothes?"
"Then my occupation would be gone."
"How so?"
"People would not talk so loud before a well-dressed man."
"You are a professional sneak and eavesdropper."
"You may call me what you please, but I charge for my information all the same."
"Well, proceed."
"Ricetti, in his wine, boasted that he was employed to do the work."
"By whom was he employed?"
"A Corsican, named Salabert."
Ned spoke boldly, and his words had a remarkable effect upon his auditor.
"You scoundrel! You are not the innocent rascal you pretend to be!"
"I do not pretend to be innocent. I am the smartest man in Paris, and make my living with my ears and my tongue."
"You will get into trouble some fine day."
"I am prepared. I am no coward."
"Continue your story."
"Ricetti is a cunning man, and he said to himself, I will find out all about that young lady."
"If he said this to himself, how did you chance to overhear it?"
"I will tell you. I concluded he had so said from what he did afterward."
"What did he do afterward?"
"He studied to discover the young lady."
"Why did not the men who employed him tell him where to find his victim?"
"They did not know where to find her themselves."
François Salabert did not know what to think. A hundred suspicions crossed his mind as to the identity of the man who knew so much of a secret conspiracy.
He decided to let the man proceed, hoping that by a chance word he would give himself away; but, as our readers can well discern, Old Ironsides, the wonderful American detective, was not the man to give himself away so easily.
"Proceed, and tell me about Ricetti."
"I thought it would stand me in hand to follow Ricetti, and I did."
"And what did you discover?"
"Should I tell you my information, it would all be yours."
"Well?"
"It cost me time, and many sleepless hours to get my information."
"And you wish a price named before you proceed?"
"I should like to finger a little gold."
"How much?"
"A few napoleons."
"Give me some real information, and I will pay you five napoleons."
"At once?"
"Yes."
"I dogged Ricetti night and day, and at last he discovered the residence of the young lady, and so did I."
"Where does she live?" demanded François, eagerly.
"I am only paid to give you information concerning Ricetti."
"But I wish to know where the young lady resides?"
"When I tell you about Ricetti, you will not care to know where the young lady resides."
"Why not?"
"Let me tell my tale."
"Proceed."
"Ricetti entered the apartment where the young lady lodged, and found her alone."
"And what did you do?"
"It matters not what I did. It is enough for me to tell you what befell Ricetti. He found the young lady to be one of the most beautiful women in all Paris. He had previously learned that she was rich, and he had learned more."
"What more had he learned?"
"That a fortune depended upon her life; that if she were dead, the Salabert family would inherit her great fortune!"
François rose from his seat and caught the vagrant by the throat, and in a fierce tone said:
"Tell me who you are, or I will choke you!"
The vagrant did not flinch. He sat as cool as a cucumber, although Salabert was really choking him.
When the Corsican relaxed his grasp, the vagrant said:
"You will close my mouth—not open it."
"I must know who you are."
"I will not tell you; it's none of your business. I am selling you my information, nothing more."
"You shall yet tell me who you are."
"I may, and I may not."
"Proceed."
"Ricetti said to himself, 'Why should I kill this girl? Why should I sell her to Salabert? No, no; I will make her my wife.'"
François Salabert was the most perplexed man in all Paris.
The vagrant resumed his tale.

CHAPTER LV.

"RICETTI told his tale to the young lady, told her he had been employed to assassinate her."
"Did he tell her who had employed him?"
"He did; and then proposed to make her his wife."
"If you can prove your tale, fellow, your fortune is made!"
"I can prove my tale."
"Proceed."
"The beautiful lady spurned him with scorn. Ricetti became excited and angry, and at length threatened her, and would have killed her, but an apparition appeared upon the scene."
"An apparition?"
"Well, it seemed an apparition to Ricetti. A man stepped from a secret closet, a powerful man."
"Who was the man?"
"I do not know."
"You have since found out?"
"The man seized Ricetti and flung him across the room. Ricetti's neck struck upon the arm of a chair and he was stunned."
"Stunned!"
"Let me proceed. The man and the woman, seeing that he was dead, were frightened. They did not know what to do, but at length the man said:
"'We must do something with the body, and he went out and left the lady alone."
François listened to the thrilling tale with straining ears and starting eyeballs. He would not have believed it, were it not that the nar-

rator had betrayed an intimate knowledge of certain *facts*.

"The man went out," resumed the vagrant "and when he returned, the dead man and the girl had both disappeared."

"The man was not dead?"

"Well, dead people don't walk off with handsome young ladies."

"Ricetti carried off the girl?"

"Yes."

"And where is he?"

"I lost track of him."

"This is a nice fable you have told me!"

"I have earned my money."

"No; I am prepared to pay for the truth. You are a cunning fellow, and you have trumped up this tale to get your wine money from me."

"And you will not pay me?"

"Not one sou."

"Very well, I can not help it; go and find Ricetti yourself!"

"Ah, you know where Ricetti is to be found?"

"I am not a fool!"

"Lead me to him, and you shall have the money!"

"I would not trust you; when I show you the man, you would say it was not Ricetti, but Altinni, and you would not pay!"

"I will pay you!"

"You have lied to me once; you can not do so again!"

"Be careful, fellow!"

"I will be careful not to trust a man who has once failed on his word!"

"Come, I will give you the money in advance, and you shall lead me to Ricetti."

"I would throw the money in your face; good day!"

"Hold, fellow!"

"Well?"

"You do not know to whom you have been talking."

"I can guess."

"I am Rideau, the detective, and you will tell me all you know or go with me to the station!"

The vagrant laughed, and said:

"Do you suppose I have lived in Paris ten years for nothing?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are no more Rideau than I am. Rideau never proclaims himself when he makes an arrest; he never threatens."

"We will see."

The vagrant reached over, and whispered:

"I could tell you something that would make your hair turn gray."

"What can you tell me?"

"You are not safe here!"

François was no coward, and smiled disdainfully as he answered:

"My life is in danger?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"Ricetti. He will kill all the Salaberts. He will make sure of his prize."

The vagrant started up, and would have gone away. Salabert followed him, and said:

"Hold, my good man. I will employ you, and pay you well. You know me?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Then enter my service."

"No. You are a dishonorable man; but I have warned you. Look out!"

The vagrant walked out of the place.

François Salabert stood a moment, undecided what to do.

The vagrant had mysteriously disappeared.

Ned walked down the street and joined Peter, who was disguised as a market-woman. The two men were talking together, when Ned's eye fell upon the face of a man whom he had seen before. The man was in a clumsy disguise, but Ned recognized him. The fellow was none other than Ricetti.

Our hero's first impulse was to seize the man, but he restrained himself. The capture of Ricetti was not the recovery of the missing Mystery of Paris.

The American slipped up a dark alley-way, and wrought one of his marvelous changes, and within the moment was on the track of Ricetti.

He saw the fellow enter a *café*. Ned gave a few hurried instructions to Peter, and followed Ricetti into the drinking-place.

The detective's change was perfect.

Parisians make no distinction between white and colored people, and it was seemingly a genuine negro who followed Ricetti into the *café*.

One fact was established in our hero's mind; Emily Salabert still lived.

In the meantime, Peter set about carrying out his instructions.

François Salabert had returned inside the *café*, and was seated at a table with a bottle of wine before him.

The man believed the vagrant would return to claim his pay.

A boy entered and handed the man a card, on which was written the following words:

"Ricetti is in the Cafe Aux Palmiers. He is disguised. You will know him. B."

François glanced at the card and read the information with a look of surprise upon his face. But in a moment he arose and proceeded to the *café* indicated on the card.

Ricetti had called for his wine. The man sat with a gloomy look upon his face.

François seated himself at the same table and said:

"Well, Ricetti, I have been looking for you."

A black look shot over the Italian's face.

"You have been looking for me?"

"Yes."

With cool impudence the brigand demanded: "*Who are you?*"

CHAPTER LVI.

"Ah! that is your game!" said François.

"I do not know you."

"I know you!"

"Well?"

"You are an underhand and treacherous scoundrel!"

"Be careful!" said Ricetti.

"You villain! dare you threaten me?"

"Yes."

Both men glared at each other with glittering eyes.

"What do you want with me?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Well, come with me and I will answer you."

"You will answer me here!"

"Not one word."

"Oh, yes, you will, or I will call the police!"

"You will call the police?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"I will tell them you are Ricetti."

The Italian turned pale, not with fear, but with rage.

"You will tell them I am Ricetti?"

"I will."

"Then I will tell them you are Salabert, and that you employed me to do a murder!"

"Good; and I will tell them you obeyed me!"

"It is false! I have left your service!"

"Why?"

"That is my own business."

"You do not choose to tell?"

"No."

"I will speak for you; the girl is in your possession."

"You lie!" yelled the Italian, and, quick as a flash, he drew a poniard, and the career of François Salabert would have ended then and there, but the colored man leaped across the room and seized the brigand by the wrist. He had saved Salabert's life.

As it chanced, the little tragic scene had passed quickly, and without noise, and at the moment there were no other customers in the place, and the proprietor had stepped to the door.

There were reasons why the three actors in the scene did not wish to call in outside interference.

Both men were astonished at the interposition of the negro; but François expressed no gratitude to the savior of his life.

Ricetti came to the conclusion that the negro was a guard who had come with Salabert, and he said:

"Ah! you dared not come alone!"

François was prepared to take advantage of the incident, and answered:

"Not when I have such as you to deal with!"

"You have nothing to do with me."

"Yes; I have something to do with a traitor!"

"I am no traitor; I have left your service."

"Where is the girl?"

"I know nothing of any girl."

"Don't forget whom you are talking to, villain!"

"I do not care whom I am talking to. I know my rights."

"Your rights?"

"Yes."

"Where is the girl?"

"I know nothing of any girl. I told you once I had left your service."

"You did not leave my service until you had made a captive of the girl."

Ricetti laughed and said:

"What romance are you talking?"

"I will tell you a romance."

"Please do; we sons of Italy are very romantic in our dispositions."

"It was quite a romance when the apparition stepped from the closet and knocked you down and left you for dead!"

Ricetti turned pale, and this time the pallor was born of a sense of fear.

"It was a romance when you simulated death, and afterward returned to life and made a captive of the girl!"

"'Sdeath!" ejaculated the Italian, "are you the Evil One?"

"Yes; and now, you can tell me where you have secreted your captive?"

"You know so much, you ought to know that."

"I do."

"Very well, then do not seek the information of me."

"You think you have played a nice game."

"You were trying to play a nice game yourself."

"So you admit all I say?"

"I admit nothing; I deny nothing; I defy you."

François regretted he had not placed greater reliance upon the story of the vagrant. He had come to know that the strange man who had imparted the information to him spoke the truth.

"You defy me?"

"I do."

"Enough! we shall meet again!"

"We may."

François rose from his seat and left the place.

The Italian looked for the negro to go, but the latter remained.

"Your employer has gone," said Ricetti.

"He is not my employer."

"He is not your employer?"

"No."

"Then why did you interfere?"

"I did not wish to see you commit a murder."

"Do you know that man?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"François Salabert."

"And you are not in his employ?"

"I am not."

"You are his friend?"

"No; I am his enemy."

"His enemy?"

"Yes."

"And you saved his life?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

The negro changed his seat and took a position at the same table as Ricetti.

"You ask me who I am?"

"I do."

"Well, I am a poor devil who is knocking around for something to do."

Ricetti rose from his seat and left the saloon."

Ned soon followed, and a few moments later had changed his appearance again.

He was joined by Peter.

"Where did the man go?"

"To a tumble-down building just beyond here."

The two men walked up the street, and entered a dark, narrow court, on either side of which were some miserable little one-story houses, as old, seemingly, as Paris itself.

Peter walked to the house at the end of the court, and, pointing toward it, said:

"Ricetti entered that house."

"You can go," said Ned; "but remain on the watch."

The American made a careful and thorough survey of the house, and after a few moments knocked at the door.

There came no answer to his summons, and he knocked louder. Still there came no answer.

The detective tried the door, and found it locked.

He was a bold man. He looked around. The alley-way was deserted; no lamp shone from any of the windows, nor were there any public lights to dispel the darkness.

"I must go into that house," muttered Ned; and he made good his word.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE detective always went prepared to overcome any little obstacles like locked doors, and he was not without his little lock-opener at the moment.

In his own mind the detective was satisfied that he had struck the place where the beautiful Mystery of Paris was a captive; and it was his determination to save her or take the chance of a Paris pauper funeral.

Ned managed to slip the lock, when he learned that there was a bolt on the inner side; with an impatient exclamation he gave one strong push and the door yielded.

The detective stepped over the threshold, and found himself face to face with a remarkable-looking female.

The latter held a candle in her hand, and its sickly glare revealed her features.

It was a ghastly face the eyes of our hero encountered: and Ned was just the man to interpret the meaning of its ghastliness.

The woman was terrorized; her features were convulsed with fright.

Any keen eyed person can take in the contour of a face at a glance, and Ned observed that the woman had once been handsome; but alas! all her beauty had departed and she was still young.

In trembling tones, she asked:

"What do you want?"

Ned shut the door, and answered:

"Why did you not open when I knocked?"

"Why should I open? Who are you, and why have you come here? Why did you burst in the door?"

"I burst in the door because you refused to open it."

"I am not bound to open my door."

"But I am bound to open it for you, when I wish to enter."

"You must not come in here."

"I am already in here, my good woman."

"You must go out!"

"Oh, no."

The woman leaned forward and whispered in the American's ear in a husky voice:

"Death is in this house!"

"That is the old fellow I am looking for. I've seen pictures of him, but I have never seen the old fellow himself, and I am come to see him."

"Oh, do not come in!"

"The more you beg me to stay out, the more anxious I am to come in; so clear the track!"

The woman put herself in his way.

"You shall not enter."

Ned reached forth his powerful arm, seized the woman by the wrist, and said:

"Stand aside, if you please!"

"No! no!"

Ned pushed the woman to one side, and turned just in time to save his life.

The woman had drawn a long stiletto, and had aimed a blow at his back.

Once more Ned's strong grasp closed on the woman's wrist, as he gave her a wrench, and, at the same moment, he exclaimed:

"What do you mean?"

"Fly while you have a chance!"

"I have no wings," retorted Ned, "and I never practiced flying without them."

"Depart while you can."

"Not I! It's nice and pleasant in here. I must see further."

The woman dashed the candle to the floor, and they were in total darkness.

"Hang you!" cried Ned, involuntarily speaking in English.

The woman attempted to dash by him, but Ned seized her. It was a risky undertaking, but he held her at arm's length.

Ned walked on, pushing the woman before him, and in a moment he entered a room where there was a light: three men were seated at a table drinking and playing cards, but the moment Ned entered the room, all of them leaped to their feet and drew their knives.

The woman called out:

"This man broke down the outer door and forced his way into the house."

"What do you want?" came the demand.

"Death!" was the strange reply.

The very strangeness of the answer disconcerted them. One of them said:

"You are in the wrong house. You have made a mistake."

"No; I am in the right house. The woman told me it was the right house."

"I told you nothing," cried the woman.

"Yes, you did. You told me death was in this house, and death is the fellow I am after! Which one among you is death?" demanded Ned.

One of the men exclaimed:

"He is crazy!"

"I am not crazy, my friend. I am after death. Where is he?"

The men looked more and more amazed. The woman, however, kept her head and exclaimed:

"Kill him! He is a spy!"

The men uttered curses and made a leap toward our hero.

Old Ironsides had been calculating his chances, and as the men leaped toward him, his powerful foot ascended, and the table on which the candles stood went over, and the men were in darkness.

CHAPTER LVIII.

"Well, madame, we are in the midst of death!"

"You shall not escape!" came the response, in a hissing tone.

"Oh, yes, I shall escape, but you shall not!"

"I know you!"

"Oh, do you?"

"I do."

"Well, who am I?"

"But one man in France would dare do what you have done!"

"Well, he must be a pretty good man."

"We have been expecting you!"

"Oh, have you?"

"You came into this house voluntarily?"

"I did."

"You will never leave it alive!"

"If your later prophecies prove as true as your first one, I am all right yet, I reckon."

"Go now if you would leave this house at all."

"I am not ready to go."

"Rideau, you have brought down your own doom upon your head!"

"You think I am Rideau?"

"I know it."

"You are sadly mistaken. I am the other fellow; and now come here."

"Go to you?"

"Yes."

The detective crossed the room and seized hold of the woman. She struggled, but Ned soon subdued her, and in a moment had locked the indispensables upon her wrists.

"You can wag your tongue," he said, "but you can not do much harm."

Ned always carried a coil of strong twine with him, and soon had the woman securely bound.

"Now, then, how is that, my sweet dear?"

"Oh, it's your time for a moment, but *they will be back soon!*"

"Will they?" said Ned.

The words sunk down deep in his memory, as did other expressions that had fallen from the woman's lips.

Ned glanced at the woman, and in a significant tone, asked:

"Where is he?"

"Where is who?"

"The other fellow."

The woman had become strangely subdued.

"Which other man?"

"Ricetti."

"Eh?" ejaculated the woman. "You came here to find Ricetti?"

"He is the man I am after."

"You wish to see him?"

"I do."

"Wait, and he will be here. He is busy now."

The woman spoke in a taunting and very confident tone.

"I reckon I will sit down and rest awhile and wait till he comes."

He then said:

"Tell me all. What place is this?"

"I dare not tell you anything."

The woman looked in a furtive manner. Ned knew that she desired to tell.

"Who were those men?"

"You know."

"I do not."

"You have been a year searching for them."

"No; I have not, woman. I am not Rideau!"

"You are not Rideau?"

"I am not."

"You are his agent?"

"I am not his agent."

"Those men were the three ghouls"

"Well, what was their business?"

"Oh, if I dared speak!"

"You can speak."

"And you will spare me?"

Ned was after information. He was convinced that he had stumbled upon one of the hidden mysteries of Paris, and he said:

"I will spare you."

"You will give me a chance to escape?"

"That depends."

"Man, I am innocent! I would have revealed the truth long ago. I would have given those men over to the guillotine, but I dared not!"

"Why did you not dare do so?"

"Oh, I fear to die; and had I confessed, they would have guillotined me with them!"

"You have a fearful tale to tell?"

"I have."

CHAPTER LIX.

"Do you know Ricetti?"

"I do."

"He came into this house to-night?"

"Yes; a few moments before you came."

"He was here last night?"

"Yes."

Ned's voice was tremulous, and a pallor overspread his face, and his heart almost stood still as he asked the second question:

"Did the fellow Ricetti come here alone?"

"No."

"A woman was with him?"

"A woman was carried into this house."

Ned reeled in his chair.

In a husky voice he asked:

"*Was she carried through that fatal door?*"

"Yes."

Ned uttered a wail. He feared that he had come too late, and that Emily Salabert had really fallen a victim to the ghouls.

It would have been bad enough for the poor ill-fated girl to have been killed under any circumstances, but to be slaughtered under all the horrible surroundings of that room of blood, was too terrible to contemplate.

"Woman," he said, "have you told me the truth, or have you from your fertile brain weaved this tale?"

"I have told you the truth."

"Is Ricetti one of the gang?"

"I never saw him here until within the last few weeks."

"And he brought a lady here last night?"

"He came here well on toward morning, and in his arms he bore a female form."

"Have none of your neighbors ever suspected the character of this house?"

"No. All was done at night."

"And the police have never 'piped' the place?"

"Never. We have feared you—never the other police."

"Why not?"

"They received gold, and never asked any questions."

"Show me the direction toward the fatal door."

"Release me, and I will lead you."

"No, I shall not release you."

"And you will leave me here?"

The woman's face worked with agony.

"I must leave you here, while I make an investigation."

"Do not go alone. Summon the police, and have the place razed to the ground."

"Afterward, madame. I shall go through the fatal door alone."

"Be warned!"

"I have been warned. I fear nothing."

"But you may run over fatal traps; you do not know at what moment you may be precipitated down some noisome pit."

"I will take all the chances."

"You will never come forth alive"

"We will see."

Ned rose from his seat.

"Oh, do not leave me! Set me free; Let me go to the street, and flee to a place of refuge!"

"No: you must remain, and await my return."

Ned left the room.

The woman called after him.

"Hold! hold! Let me tell you!"

Ned returned, and asked:

"Well, what have you to tell me?"

"Traps are set at every hand. The men were prepared for the police—prepared to die, if necessary. But they would die with many others. You know not their cunning contrivances. I pray you be warned!"

The woman's words began to have some effect upon the American. He did know that there was a possibility that he might become the victim of some cunning death-trap; but what could he do?

Ned was a man who had been in the habit of going it alone.

An idea entered his mind. He said to the woman:

"Wait and keep quiet, and I will not leave you alone."

The detective went from the room and from the house.

He had gone to look for Peter.

He found the Indian awaiting him outside.

"What have you discovered?"

"Do not ask me. I have struck a den of horrors!"

"Is Emily there?"

"I do not know."

"I have seen our enemies."

"Who?"

"François and his cousin Armand."

"They are in the neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"Did they see you?"

"Not to recognize me, but they are not alone; a stranger is with them."

"Who is the stranger?"

"I do not know him."

"Describe his appearance!"

The Indian described the man's appearance, and Ned said:

"It is Rideau."

"The great detective?"

"Yes."

"Then we had better leave the vicinity."

"Leave?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Rideau is a terrible man."

"I do not fear Rideau nor any one else; come with me."

"Had I not better remain here and watch the Corsicans?"

"No."

"They may find our man quicker than ourselves."

"We have found him."

"Is Ricetti in there?"

"He is not far off."

"But look, there comes François!"

Ned did not wish the Corsican nor Rideau nor any one else to be with him while he was making an investigation of the house of horrors.

He was amazed that François had been able to track him down so close.

"You go into that house and remain there until I return; the Corsican must be thrown off the track."

"What will I find in the house?"

"A woman tied to a chair."

Peter was brave, but the detective had named too horrible a picture for him. Frankly he said:

"I dare not enter!"

Ned remembered that all men did not possess his iron nerve.

"Remain here," he said; "those men must be thrown off the track."

Ned had assumed a different disguise, but in a moment he had changed back to the vagrant.

It has taken us some time to relate the above conversation and incidents, but they transpired in a few seconds.

François had walked slowly up the alley; the man was cautious—evidently on his guard against a surprise. It was a dangerous vicinity, and the Corsican knew it and was careful, although a villain himself.

CHAPTER LX.

THERE were many reasons, as Ned had stated, why he wished to investigate the house of horrors alone.

One would think that he should have rushed in at all hazards to have rescued Emily Salabert, but Ned knew that had she really been taken into the den of horrors, her fate was already decided, and he was determined to make sure of his game. He had a desperate hand to play, and was determined to play exactly right.

Ned walked down the alleyway and ran against François Salabert. The act was seemingly an accident.

François had been intently gazing at a certain house, and had not seen the man coming. He looked upon the incident as an act of carelessness, and turning round with an angry exclamation recognized the vagrant.

"Ah! you here!"

"Hallo! is it you again?"

"You are dogging me," said François.

"I beg your pardon, you are dogging me, but you will gain nothing."

"My good fellow, I would like to have a few words with you."

"I am not of the same mind. You failed in your word with me once."

"I doubted your word."

"Ah, did you?"

"I did."

"You might doubt again."

"No. I have reason to believe that you told me the truth."

"Ah! When Ricetti attempted to stick his poniard in you it came across your mind that I might have told the truth?"

François was puzzled to understand the singular-looking vagrant, who appeared to know everything. At the moment he had been assailed by the brigand no one had been present besides himself and the assailant and the negro who had interfered.

"You can make some gold, my good man."

"Ah! You will teach me to become an alchemist?"

"No; but I will pay you for your services."

"Do you think I would accept a promise from you again?"

"Yes, I do."

"Listen. Since Ricetti declares he has left your service, would you take me to occupy his place?"

François gazed at the man with a look of wonder upon his face. This mysterious and smart-spoken vagrant appeared to know everything.

"Fellow, who are you?"

"You have asked me that question before, and I have told you it was none of your business."

"You are not what you seem."

"Am I not?"

"You are not."

"Well, what odds? I am enough for you. And now I will do you a service."

"You will?"

"I will."

"What service can you do me?"

"Your life was attempted once to-night."

"I am prepared now."

"You may think you are, but Ricetti wants you out of the way. He has accomplished his purpose. He has the girl."

"Are you Ricetti?" came the abrupt question, as a suspicion crossed the Corsican's mind.

"I am not Ricetti! How could I be?"

"You appear to be in the man's interest."

"Oh, no; I am doing you a kindness."

"I do not fear Ricetti."

"You do not contend against Ricetti alone. He has agents to aid him; you and your cousins are all doomed, if you would live, leave France! Good-night!"

The vagrant moved rapidly away.

François Salabert followed the man.

Ned knew that he was being followed. He wished to be followed.

François saw his man enter a *café*. Ned desired him so to do.

François ran rapidly up the street and entered another *café*. Two men were seated at a table.

"Come!" said François.

The two men joined him; once on the street François related the incidents of his second meeting with the vagrant; his narrative was told to the man who was in company with his cousin Armand, the man whom Peter had described to our hero.

"Who is the fellow?"

"I know him not."

"You never saw him until to-night?"

"No."

"He is the same man you met before?"

"The same man."

François had told the story of his former meeting with the vagrant.

"Lead me to the *café* where he entered."

"I will; and point him out to you."

"You need not point him out to me. Show me the place only, and you and Armand return and await me here."

The vagrant was seated at a table drinking his wine; everybody drinks wine in Paris—rich and poor—red wine.

The man who had been directed to the place entered and exchanged a few words with the proprietor.

The latter turned pale upon being addressed, but nodded affirmatively.

The vagrant had been watching every movement.

The stranger sook a seat near to the vagrant, and after a moment addressed him:

"I have seen you before, my friend."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"That is not strange, as I am often in this neighborhood."

"Will you have some wine with me?"

"Yes, certainly; it is always pleasant for me to drink at another's expense."

"We will have our wine in yonder room. We will drink good wine—champagne."

"Good; I like champagne."

"Come."

The two men adjourned to the little room reserved for private supper-parties; the man who had extended the invitation closed the door.

The vagrant glanced into a mirror, and did a queer thing. He winked at his own image, and the wink meant "*this is* all right."

The inviter forgot to order the wine. He had closed the door, seated himself, and bade the vagrant do likewise.

The latter said coolly:

"You have forgotten?"

"What have I forgotten."

"You have forgotten to order the wine."

"Are you really wine-thirsty?"

"I am."

"Order in the wine."

"Oh, no."

"Why not?"

"If I order it I will have to pay for it; you are a stranger to me. I was to drink at your expense, not you at mine."

"You are a cautious chap."

"I have lived long enough to learn that it is well to go slow with strangers in Paris."

"Touch the bell."

"I'll do that; they do not charge for that."

"You are a suspicious fellow."

"Yes."

A moment and the wine was brought in; after it had been opened and a glass set before each man, the man who had ordered the wine said:

"Do you know why I asked you in here?"

CHAPTER LXI.

THE vagrant replied coolly:

"I've an idea."

"What is your idea?"

"You thought I looked thirsty."

The man who had put the question suddenly clapped a pistol to the cheek of the vagrant, and said:

"I have a direct manner of doing business!"

"I see you have!" came the cool reply, and the vagrant did not even turn pale, but he kept his eye fixed on the man who held the pistol; indeed, looked him square in the eyes.

"You are a nervy man!"

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions.

"All right."

"If you do not answer me you are a dead man!"

"I'll do as I choose about answering your questions."

"Do you see I have you at an advantage?"

"Oh, no, you do not use your eyes, or you would see that yours is in mine!"

The man who held the pistol glanced downward just once, and in that moment his wrist was seized, and from under the table appeared a cocked revolver, held in the hand of the vagrant.

"Ah! do you see it is not all your own way?"

"You fool! Do you know me?"

"Yes."

"Who am I?"

"Rideau."

"And who are you?"

"None of your business.

"Be careful."

"I've no need to be careful."

Rideau, the great detective, was matched. He had been beaten by a vagrant.

The latter said:

"At no time did you have the advantage of me, monsieur. I had you covered from the first moment you sat at the table."

"But my weapon was against your cheek."

"But I had the glance of your eye. I would have read your intention as you formed it. You would have been a dead man before the muscle of your finger straightened for a pull!"

"And you knew me from the start?"

"I did."

"Will you tell me who you are?"

"No."

"It is not necessary."

"Well?"

"I know you."

"Ah!"

"Yes; you are the American—the only man who is a match for Rideau!"

"Thank you; that is *my name in full!*"

"You are a wonderful man!"

"Yes; it takes a wonderful man to overmatch Rideau."

"You are right."

"And now what does it all mean."

"I am here to find the girl."

"You can not find her."

"You have her?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"I am looking for her."

"Ah, I see! You mean that where you fail, it is useless for any one else to look."

"No; I mean that I will not let you find her."

"You would make it a game between us?"

"Yes."

"All right, I must beat you once."

"Rideau, I've a favor to ask of you."

"I must grant a favor to a man who has beaten me."

"I can do you a great service in return."

"Your favor is granted."

"I do not wish Salabert to be informed as to my identity."

"Ah! you would tie my hands in the game we are to play against each other?"

"No."

"Then ask something else."

"You do not wish to accede to my request?"

"It will be very mortifying to do so."

"Why?"

"I have promised to discover your identity."

"And reveal it to Salabert?"

"Yes."

"I could have fooled you."

"I will not admit that."

"I know it."

"Well?"

"I have said I could do you a great favor."

"Yes."

"Send Salabert and his cousin from here."

"You ask too much."

"Listen! You can tell them that you want a clear field against the vagrant. When you meet them again you can tell them who the vagrant was that knew so much."

"You have said you could do me a favor?"

"I can."

"What is it?"

"I can do more for your reputation as a detective, in five minutes, than you can do for yourself in as many years."

"That is a bold promise."

"I can make it good."

"What will you have me do?"

"Send the Salaberts away."

"Am I to make my great reputation at their expense?"

"No."

"It is independent of our game against each other?"

"Yes."

"I will take your word."

"Do so, and return here, and I will a tale unfold that will make your hair stand on end!"

A suspicion crossed Rideau's mind.

"I can trust you?"

"As well as I can trust you."

"How do you mean?"

"There must be no question about the departure of the Salaberts from this neighborhood!"

"Why are you so anxious to have them go away?"

"To save their lives."

"There is something behind all this."

"Yes, there is."

"Enough. I can take your word?"

"You can."

"I will."

"How long will you be gone?"

"A few moments."

"Remember there must be no mistake: the Salaberts must go away. I will hold you responsible for that!"

"You can."

"Go, and I will await you here."

Rideau left the saloon.

He went to where the Salaberts awaited him.

"Who is the man?" asked François.

"I will tell you later."

"Why not now?"

Rideau laughed, and said, in a careless tone:

"There are many detectives in Paris."

"One of your own men, eh?"

"I can not say more; but you must guess."

"His warnings to me are explained."

"I will second the warnings you have received; I can do this business alone."

"Am I not safe in the company of the great Rideau? are not all the police of Paris at your call?"

"Rideau does not desire to call on all the police of Paris."

"And your advice?"

"That you go to your home and wait for me to come."

"You have discovered something?"

"I expect to learn something."

"You have not turned against us?"

"I am Rideau; you can stay if you choose."

The detective spoke in a tone that conveyed a world of meaning, but there came an objection to his proposition.

CHAPTER LXII.

ARMAND SALABERT was a suspicious and distrustful man, and he said:

"You may go, François, but I will remain. I wish to interview this wonderful vagrant just once."

"You will remain?" said Rideau.

"I will remain."

"Then I will go."

The French detective spoke in a determined tone.

François said to his cousin:

"Come, we will go."

"No; I will interview the vagrant."

"Let him," said Rideau.

"Will it interfere with your plans?"

"No matter. He is determined; let him have his own way."

"Armand, come with me."

"I will not."

Armand was an obstinate and determined fellow—what we would call in America, a mule.

Again Rideau said:

"Let him go!"

The French detective knew well enough that the American was fully capable of taking care of himself.

"Where is the man?" asked Armand.

Rideau told him, and Armand went forth.

"Let me detain him," said François.

"No; let him learn a lesson. I had told him the man was one of our force."

"You did not say so."

"I so implied."

"Then I will go after Armand."

"Do as you please."

François went out and overtook his cousin.

"Come, Armand," he said, "return with me."

"No; I will see the man."

"He is a detective, a friend of Rideau. I knew it, and the admission explains the mystery of the fellow's knowledge of our affairs."

"You are a mere child, François; you believe all you hear. I do not; I wish to investigate for myself."

"You would call me a fool?"

"Almost."

"You may discover you are the biggest fool! These detectives will not brook interference; you are working against your own interest."

"We will see."

Armand went on, and François returned to where the great detective awaited him.

"He is mad! He would go!"

"Well, let him go. He will learn something. He will be easier to manage in future."

Old Ironsides sat in the room where Rideau had left him. He saw Armand enter the door.

"Aha!" he muttered, "is this treachery?"

Armand was a blusterer, as stated in a former chapter—a loud-mouthed, blatant sort of a chap, who believed himself to be very smart. He walked right into the room where Ned was sitting, and said:

"Good-evening."

Ned answered:

"You are a stranger to me."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Well, a gentleman can become acquainted with fellows like you at his will."

"*Gentlemen* may, but not you!"

"Eh? You are an impertinent dog."

"Yes; there are two of us, but you are the meanest dog."

Armand was a fellow who had no control of his temper, and, in a fierce tone, he said:

"If I did not have a few questions to ask of you, I would wring your neck!"

"You may have a chance before we separate."

"Who are you?"

"Take your own question back. Who are you?"

"None of your business!"

"And you may take the same answer from me."

"You are in disguise, you rascal, and I will uncover you!"

As Armand spoke, he made an attempt to seize hold of Old Ironsides.

At once the circus commenced. Ned just let out. He had one of his "turns" come over him very suddenly. He grasped his man, and the big Armand went spinning around like a top. Ned dashed him against the door-jambs and flung him with great violence to the floor. He jumped upon him in New York rough-and-tumble style, and in about seventeen American seconds had made such a sight of Armand as to make him a pitiable object to behold.

There was no interference. The man who owned the *café* had received a warning. He knew the man from whom the warning had come, and he let the circus go on.

One of the men in the place, however, ran out and called a policeman.

The latter came running into the place just as Armand was flung into the street.

The policeman attempted to seize hold of Ned, and was himself sent flying after the Corsican.

The policeman regained his feet, and drawing his saber started to renew the assault, but he was met by a man who whispered a word in his ear.

The policeman immediately had business in another direction. He had recognized Rideau, and Rideau under the circumstances was king.

Armand had gotten enough. He ran up the street when he was met by François.

The big Corsican was completely bewildered, and in his excitement let out and knocked his own cousin down.

"The man is mad!" ejaculated François, as he regained his feet.

Rideau at that moment came along, and in the meantime Armand had recognized François.

"Aha!" said Rideau. "What did I tell you? Now go! You have learned a lesson!"

Armand had recovered himself, and wished to run back and lay out his man, but François dragged him away.

As they went off, Rideau said:

"I will see you later."

After having flung the Corsican around, Ned resumed his seat and awaited the return of Rideau.

The Frenchman soon put in an appearance.

"Well, you have laid him out?"

"Yes; why was he permitted to come here?"

"He insisted upon coming, and I made up my mind that you could manage him, and that it would be the quickest mode of getting rid of him!"

"Well, I did sling him a bit."

"I should say you did. He is an obstinate fellow!"

"He is a fool! if you take him to work with you, he will spoil your tricks every time."

"I do not propose to work with him, so I sent him along for you to work him up."

"Well, I reckon he will feel rather sore in his points in the morning."

"Now, then, I am at your service," said Rideau.

"I am glad of an opportunity to work with you once as a friend," said Ned.

"Yes; I am glad we are to work together; you have made a discovery?"

"Yes."

"We will proceed and work it up."

"I would ask you a question; there have been some mysterious disappearances in Paris during the last year?"

Rideau showed considerable excitement, a rare incident in the usual demeanor of the great French detective.

"Yes; there have been some remarkable disappearances."

"And you have been working on the mystery?"

"I have."

"You have not struck the secret?"

"I have not."

"I have tumbled on it for you; we will to-night root out the greatest horror of the century."

CHAPTER LXIII.

RIDEAU gazed at the American with a look of wonder upon his face.

"Have you succeeded where I failed?"

"My discovery was an accident; but I have truly fallen upon the solution of one of the greatest local mysteries of the nineteenth century."

"You have found the ghouls?"

"Ah! you knew of the existence of such a band of men?"

"I suspected."

"Come, you shall hear the tale that was told to me."

The two men passed from the *café*.

At the door of the house where the ghouls lived, stood Peter.

"Who is this man?" demanded Rideau.

"My shadow."

"You know him?"

"Yes."

"You can trust him?"

"Yes."

Addressing Peter, Ned asked:

"Have you seen or heard anything?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"A scream!"

"A woman's voice?"

"Yes."

"We will enter."

Ned made up his mind that some of the ghouls had returned, and had found the woman, and he expected to find her missing upon entering the house.

For once the detective was mistaken. He found the woman tied in the chair just as he had left her, and upon the floor lay the bodies of the three ghouls.

"Hello!" ejaculated Rideau. "What has been going on here?"

"I will tell you my story, and then the woman shall tell her tale."

The detective related the story of his combat, and, when he had concluded, the Frenchman said:

"You should have been born in France."

"I beg pardon," retorted Ned, fully understanding the suggestion conveyed in Rideau's remark, "you should have been born in America. You will find more men like me in the United States than you will find men like yourself in France. But now let the woman tell her terrible tale."

The woman related the same terrible story to Rideau that she had told to Ned. The Frenchman listened, and all the time exhibited decided signs of intense agitation.

"And this has been going on in Paris, and I did not know it!" he said.

"We have the greater mystery to unravel," said Ned.

"We must go to that fatal room."

"One word first. I may find Emily Salabert alive."

"Well."

"In case I do, the discovery is my secret. It must not be told to the Salaberts."

Rideau hesitated a moment before replying.

"You hesitate."

The Frenchman was thinking of the fortune he would lose; but, in a moment, he remembered all the glory he would gain—ah, indeed, possibly a larger sum of money, and he said:

"The glory shall be mine! the public business! all other advantages, yours!"

"That is a compact; it was Rideau who slew these men; it was Rideau who unearthed the mystery; but it is the American who must hold the secret if Emily is discovered."

"Agreed; we will go together."

"No, I will go alone."

"You go alone?"

"Yes."

"Dare you?"

Ned laughed, and pointed to the three dead men, and a moment later added:

"I dare go anywhere!"

"There may be too many for you?"

"That is all right, but I have a plan."

Ned drew from his pocket a ball of strong twine, and remarked:

"We may need assistance; it is necessary for us to work together; it will not do for us to take the chance of both being killed."

"You are the bravest man I ever met!"

"Bah! we will not stop to exchange compliments now; we have business on hand!"

"The woman?"

"Let her remain where she is."

The woman now called out:

"Remember your promise!"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed the thoughtful Ned. "I have promised that woman that she shall be permitted to escape; it was the price of her confession. Do you indorse the promise?"

"I do."

Ned calculated all his peril. He knew well enough that there were many chances against his ever seeing the light of another day. In his own mind he was satisfied that the ghouls had prepared for a desperate resistance in case of discovery, and that the woman had told the truth when she had said that there were traps and manholes at every step.

The Frenchman said, as Ned began to unwind the ball of strong twine.

"Let me go! You remain here!"

"No; it is the girl I am looking for. I will go, but, hark you, we will exchange our signals."

The Frenchman and the American were two able men, both brave, both cunning, and up in every little nice point in the play of such a desperate game as they had on hand.

The signals were all arranged, and Ned started upon his perilous tour, and before he came forth, he had reason to know that he had not underrated his peril.

He had little difficulty in finding the fatal death-door over whose threshold, according to the woman's tale, so many fated people had passed to a horrible death.

The door was locked, and it was of iron.

Rideau had accompanied Ned to the door.

The two detectives only stood a moment. Rideau produced a fuse and an explosive attachment, and in a moment a dull report was heard, and the lock was blown out.

The exploding of locks has been reduced to a nice science, and the initiated easily go through the best.

The door was opened and the men found themselves in a small room, in the floor of which was a trap-door.

The trap was fastened on the inner side; and it took the two detectives some time to drill a hole and explode the lock and slide the bolt.

They finally succeeded, and a passage downward was disclosed.

"The rascals had it well arranged," remarked Ned, as he looked down the stone steps.

"You had better let me go with you."

"No, I will go alone."

"Your man can hold the string."

"You may need him as a messenger; and, my friend, good-bye; we may never meet again!"

"I will go with you!"

"No, but I will exact a promise; you must become the friend of Emily Salabert in case anything happens to me."

"I will; at such a moment, brave man, I can refuse you nothing!"

"Remember, when it comes to a question of reward, you will be a richer man as her friend, than as the friend of the rascals Salabert, who are no better than the men who run this charnel-house. I will tell you something—the Salaberts mean to murder the girl!"

A dark look came over Rideau's face as he listened to the last declaration.

CHAPTER LXIV.

"Do you mean to tell me," said the Frenchman, "that the Corsicans intended to murder the girl?"

"That was their purpose."

"They told me a different story."

"I will tell you the true one. I will count you as an honorable man?"

"You can."

"The Corsicans inherit the young lady's wealth if she is killed."

The detective shrugged his shoulders in the peculiar Frenchy style, and said:

"Ah! I see! they fooled me!"

"What did they tell you?"

"That they wished to force the girl into a marriage, that the property was by right their own, and that they could secure their rights in no other manner."

Ned related the true story as he had heard it from Emily, and when he had concluded, Rideau said:

"I wish I had known this sooner."

"Then I can count upon you as a friend?"

"You can; had I known the true facts, the girl would not now be missing, the Salaberts must account to me! They are assassins!"

"Yes; they are deep-dyed assassins!"

"Enough; their game is done in France; in these matters Rideau is king!"

The two men separated. Ned descended the stairs prepared to encounter horrors, but unprepared for the magnitude of the horrors that awaited him.

The detective was amazed, as he descended, to discover how many steps he was compelled to descend.

"Hang them!" he muttered. "They have burrowed into the very bowels of the earth!"

The detective fully realized that it was a fortunate thing for him that the wretches were not forewarned of his approach, as they would have had him at an advantage, against which all his nerve, coolness, and courage would have counted as naught.

When Ned reached the bottom step, he was very careful about stepping down. He had brought a heavy "billy" with him, and he commenced to "prod" around with it.

A moment, and he exclaimed:

"Lucky man! just what I was looking for!" He had touched a spring and a trap-door moved up just a little.

"Hunky boy for me!" he exclaimed.

The American had a habit when on an exploring expedition of encouraging himself. Some men sing, others whistle. Ned talked to himself, as he stated once in a jocular manner, "When I and the other fellow—that is, Ned Balfour and his shadow—get together, we have little dialogues, and Mr. Shadow always agrees with Ned."

The detective reached down and raised the trap-door, and another passage was discovered, just large enough for him to squeeze through.

As he squeezed down he remarked:

"Well, those chaps would have me dead, if they caught me here!"

The detective passed down several more steps and found himself in a subterranean passage just wide enough for him to crawl through on his hands and knees, as it was not more than two feet and a half high.

If our readers do not think it required courage to crawl through that passage just let them try it once, even with a full knowledge as to where they will fetch up.

Ned did not know where he was to fetch up. He might be crawling forward, only in the end to be precipitated into some almost bottomless pit—indeed, there is no greater test of a man's courage than the test to which the American was being subjected.

Some of the bravest detectives have recoiled, under more favorable circumstances, from trusting themselves into such a hole.

Ned crawled forward, however, and cheered himself by keeping up his dialogue with his "familiar."

"Old man," he muttered, "we are in a tight spot, and we may strike a hotter one before we come to open air again."

The detective moved along very slowly and cautiously. He was anxious to come out somewhere, as the air was stifling, and there was something suffocating like in the position itself.

The brave man did, at length, emerge somewhere. He suddenly thrust his hand forward, like a turtle shooting forward his claw from under its shell.

"That's all right so far," he muttered; "but, hang me, if I don't dread crawling back like an earth-worm through that pipe-hole in the ground!"

Ned's hand had been shot forward into an open space, and a moment later his head was shoved forward. Soon his whole body was dragged along into a large, sewer-like tunnel in which he could stand upright.

He did stand up for a moment, when he drew several long breaths.

"This is quite an improvement," he said, and he telegraphed along the line he had carried with him:

"All right."

The answering came back:

"Good!"

Having taken a breath the detective walked along the passage and traversed quite a space, when suddenly he was thrown forward, and fell to his face.

In a moment he was on his feet, and his hand went to his pistols as he heard a noise.

It was indeed a ticklish position for even a brave man.

The detective felt something moving at his feet. He knelt down, and his hand touched a booted foot.

Quick as lightning his hand was placed upon the trigger of his weapon, and in a low tone he demanded.

"Who are you? Speak, or I fire!"

He would have suspected that he had fallen over a corpse had it not been that he had felt the movement at his own feet, which appeared like a human hand feeling about in the dark.

Ned was prepared to have an enemy that he might meet in that passage coming a cunning, lay-low game, and he repeated his inquiry:

"Who is there?"

There came no response.

Again Ned said in a determined voice:

"Whoever you may be, speak, or I fire!"

Still there came no response

Ned had not come unprepared. He had lighted his masked lantern upon his first descent into the subterranean passage, but he had kept the mask down, as he did not desire to betray his presence to any lurking assassin whom he might meet.

Receiving no answer he reached one hand around, drew his masked lantern from a rear pocket, slid the mask and flashed the sharp ray down upon the face of the man over whom he had fallen.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE detective had received no answer to his question, and as the light shot downward the omission was explained.

His inquiry had been addressed to ears that would never listen again, and the cold, fixed lips were eternally sealed. He had stumbled over a corpse.

The horrible sight did not appall Ned. He was used to gazing upon the face of the dead.

He just stood and contemplated the "thing" that had once been a "man."

It was a guide to him, a ghastly sign-board, but it was a suggestion.

Ned had once met a well-known American detective in New York, who was known as the Irish detective, a gallant fellow who had figured in a remarkable life history.

Fergus Connors had told Ned of a trip he once made through an underground passage in New York from the cellar of an infamous panel-house.

The Irish detective's thrilling discovery had afterward led to some remarkable developments.

Ned remembered the story; the underground passage had been connected with one of the main sewers through which the bodies of murdered men were carried and tossed into the river, only to come to the surface in time, and add to the many mysteries of the great western continental metropolis.

Ned also remembered that it was admitted in police circles that, following the Irish detective's discovery, the finding of dead bodies in the river was not of such frequent occurrence.

As Ned gazed at the dead man before him he made up his mind that he lay there awaiting a favorable opportunity for a launchment into the Seine.

It was in this connection that the finding of the corpse served as a ghastly guide and suggestion. Ned determined to search for an entrance into the sewers.

It was a long and close search, but at length the detective struck his trail.

The Paris sewers are the most wonderful works of their kind on the face of the earth.

Under the main streets are built great stone-arched conduits, with a central channel, through which flows water to the depth of seven feet. On either side of the channel named are stone sidewalks, representing tow-paths on the side of canals, the only difference consisting in the fact that the sewer tow-paths are constructed in the most substantial manner, being strong, lateral platforms of solid masonry.

Boats are drawn through these channels; the men, who draw them with ropes, walking on either side.

It is a novel experience to go through the sewers of Paris.

Connecting with the main sewers which we have briefly described, are lateral sewers of much smaller dimensions, through which the waste-water from the side streets are carried into the main underground sewer avenues.

The American detective made a most strange and remarkable discovery. He found an ingeniously constructed iron door, which opened into one of the minor sewers; the discovery explained the whole scheme of the gang of ghouls.

At a favorable time they could carry their dead victims through the minor sewer into the main sewer avenue, and thus along to the outlet into the river, and a subject for the morgue was launched into the Seine.

Ned took in the whole thing. He had made, indeed, a wonderful discovery for his new friend Rideau.

The detective only took the bearings. He had not much time to spare. He had discovered the track of the human serpents, but he had not accomplished the main purpose that had led him to put his life in peril.

He had not found the chamber of horrors; he had not found the wretches who were somewhere concealed in that network of underground passages; he had not found Emily Salabert, dead or alive.

Ned began to indulge a hope that he would find the Mystery of Paris alive. There was one reason why Ricetti would not kill her. He would only toss a fortune into the lap of the Corsicans, whom he had already made his enemies. He had nothing to expect from them. All his chances lay in preserving the life of his victim.

As Ned thought over the matter he shuddered at the idea of what a terrible experience the beautiful woman must have encountered.

One woman, to save her life in the den of horror, had agreed to become the slave of the ghouls, and might not Emily, under similar circumstances, promise to become the bride of the wretch Ricetti? She was but a woman, and a woman will do much to save her life.

The detective, as stated, had crawled through into the minor sewer, and had walked along through the broader sewer avenues to the grand outlet.

He retraced his steps, and soon stood again beside the body of the victim of the assassins.

"There is one thing I can do," he said; "I can wait until the rascals come here to 'launch their stiff.'"

Ned would almost have done anything rather than crawl back through the narrow passage.

One such experience is enough in any man's lifetime. Indeed, the detective shuddered over and over again as the memory of that horrid trip recurred to him. He returned to where he had dropped his line of communication. He had literally run to the length of his string, and had anchored his communicating line long before he had stumbled over the dead body.

Taking up his line he signaled, "All right!" and the answering signal came:

"All right!"

Ned returned to the outlet from the narrow passage, and stood there with his lantern flashing the sharp ray upon the sides of the arched passage.

At the moment his figure was a study for an artist, as with his lamp he presented a remarkable tableau.

His well-masked face was pale, and his features wore an anxious look; but, withal, there was an expression of firm determination on his countenance.

Ned was looking for some other outlet or inlet from the larger passage. He was satisfied in his own mind that the fiends did not drag their dead victims through the passage along which he had squeezed.

His keen eye followed the dancing light as it moved from point to point on the damp walls.

It was a critical moment.

CHAPTER LXVI.

"HANG it!" said the brave man, as a chill shot through his iron frame, "I fear I will have to do that passage over again, but I would rather face death in some other shape!"

We must state that Ned had solved the mystery of the motion he had felt when standing beside the corpse. He had made the discovery that the moving object that had crossed his feet was a huge rat; the place swarmed with the lively little varmints.

The detective knelt down, intending once more to make the passage. He had closed the slide of his lamp, as he did not wish to see the horrors before him, but desired to go it blind.

He had just knelt, as stated, when he heard a sound which caused him to recoil and rise once more to his feet.

Intently he listened. The sound was but an indistinct murmur, and it took the detective some time to distinguish the noise, but at length he made out that it was the murmur of human voices.

"Aha!" he muttered. "Now we have it! I am near the den of horrors!"

He stood and listened. The murmuring voices became more distinct, and Ned was able to distinguish that the talkers were speaking in a louder tone, and still a moment later he made out that the men were quarreling.

He could distinguish a word here and there.

Where were the wranglers? and how could he get to them?

Once more the sharp flame of his light ran over the side walls of the arched passage, and he commenced to feel along the damp walls as he had seen the Irishman do in the tower-room in Ireland.

"Eureka!" was the well-known cry that at length fell from his lips.

He found a place where the mortar lines ran regular, and he was enabled to trace the outlines of a door.

Ned had an instrument with him, and he worked it in the traced line, and succeeded at last in making a crevice, and a moment later he had pried open a part of the wall.

"Well, this is pretty well done!" he remarked, as he succeeded in opening a door and disclosing a passage. "This is Frenchy enough."

The men had made a door of iron, built like a wall book-shelf, and this had been walled in with brick and stone, so that when closed only a wall surface was presented, but when the iron door opened a part of the wall was carried with it.

Ned stepped into the passage and closed the door behind him.

The time had arrived for him to go slow; at any moment he might come upon the murderers; there were three or four of them; he might have them spring upon him unawares, and against that he was determined to guard.

He walked along, and soon was enabled to hear the voices distinctly. He even recognized the voice of one of the men. He had trailed Ricetti to his secret lair.

Ned moved along and soon found himself standing at the door to a subterranean apartment. The men were within. He could hear their voices; they were indeed quarreling. He had reached the room of horror.

At the moment Ned arrived there Ricetti was speaking. There were four men in the apartment; our hero could not see them, but he was able to count them by distinguishing different voices.

"You can not intimidate me!" he heard Ricetti say.

"We are three to one!"

"Well, so be it! I will fight you all!"

"Go on, boys," muttered Ned. "Kill each other; it's all right, you will save me a dirty duty!"

"You shall reveal your secret!"

"I have nothing to reveal. You may kill me, but you will gain nothing."

"We will kill the girl!" came the startling declaration, and Ned again uttered:

"No, no, old man, it is my turn now; I am on Ricetti's side for about four American minutes!"

Ned made no effort to get into the apartment. He was lying back on the strength of the old adage, "When thieves fall out honest men get their dues!"

"Kill the girl and you will kill the goose that lays the golden egg," said Ricetti.

"We might as well kill her, rather than let her lay all the eggs for you!"

"Kill her and I open!"

"What!" came the exclamation, "you threaten?"

"Yes."

"You forfeit your life! you have taken the oath!"

"I am full of oaths from my feet to my lips; what care I for an oath!"

It was evident the assassins feared Ricetti, although they stood three to one; no other man would have dared to threaten; with the threat he would have died!

In the meantime Ned began to feel quite hopeful. He reasoned, from the words he had overheard, that Emily still lived, and, if she lived, he would find her and rescue her.

"It will be dangerous for you to use that threat," said one of the men.

"I have used it!"

"You do not mean it?"

"I do."

"And what do you propose?"

"The girl must be delivered to me. I will take her where I choose."

"Never!"

"I brought her here."

"You did."

"I shall take her away."

"Never! unless you make terms with us."

"Suppose you kill her and carry her through the sewer?"

"We will!"

"And what will you make?"

"The jewels she wore when you brought her here."

"That is all."

"That is enough, rather than let you take all!"

"You can take the jewels; give me the girl!"

"No."

"Listen. Let her body be found in the Seine, and all Paris will rise to find her murderers. Your occupation will be gone."

"Oh, no. Greater people than the mademoiselle have been found floating in the Seine. All Paris did rise, but the same week they found another dead one!"

"Ah, but you forget I will have my revenge!"

"We do not forget that."

"You dare not defy me!"

"Yes, we dare."

"Then you will rue it."

"Oh, no; you will never tell the tale."

"I will."

"Dead men tell no tales!"

"But I am not a dead man."

"You will never leave this place!"

"I will."

"Never, unless you tell us, and divide!"

"I never will!"

"Then here you stay!"

"Not one of you shall leave here!"

"We are three to one!"

"So we must fight!"

"You refuse to divide?"

"I do."

"You invite a combat?"

"I do."

At once there came the sound of a struggle, and, as Ned believed, a life-and-death combat.

CHAPTER LXVII.

"Go it, old fellow!" said Ned. "I'll see fair play! Kill each other, and I will have a less number to take a hand with when you get through."

The detective, however, was reckoning without his host.

It was not a life and-death struggle, as he had supposed. The men did not set out to kill Ricetti, but to disarm him, as our hero learned a few moments later.

It was three to one, and the three had won.

As it subsequently proved, Ricetti had not been made acquainted with all the devilish contrivances of the room of horror. He was overcome by a force against which all his prowess counted as naught.

The noise of the struggle lasted but a few seconds, and Ned heard voices again.

His foes had been lessened by one, and that one was Ricetti.

"Well, monsieur, how are you and your threats now?"

"I have my secret."

"You can keep it, and two bodies will be found in the Seine!"

"I will compromise."

"Ah! you are not so independent now?"

"You took me at a disadvantage."

"We always take enemies at a disadvantage here, especially traitors."

"Release me!"

"Oh, no; you would want to kill us all; you are all right!"

"How much gold will you take and release the girl and me?"

"How gentle you talk now."

"I have asked a question."

"Oh, yes, so you did."

The man spoke in a tone of derision.

"I asked you how much gold you would take?"

"Suppose we fix a price?"

"You may receive the money."

"From you?"

"Yes."

"You have no gold."

"I can command it."

"Through the mademoiselle?"

"Yes."

A jeering laugh was the brigand's answer.

"Fool! you are doomed!"

"Not when I can pay."

"Your threat sealed your fate; you can not treat with us; no gold will buy you freedom!"

"What do you mean?"

"We will leave you here, leave you to die, to starve like a rat in a cage!"

Ricetti commenced to cringe and beg.

"You need not beg, you are doomed!"

"I will tell my secret."

"Do so. Tell us who is the young lady."

"You will spare my life?"

"Yes."

Ricetti was conquered. He told the whole tale.

"Aha! you would make the girl your wife?"

"Yes."

"And gain a large fortune?"

"Yes; which I will share with you."

"Why should we share when we can take all?"

"What do you mean?"

"The mademoiselle is handsome. She is rich. She will make a wife for me, and you shall have a monument."

"You will release me?"

"No."

"You will leave me here?"

"Yes."

"But I have your word."

"I am full of broken promises from my feet to my lips!" came the taunting reply, a repetition of Ricetti's own defiant words.

"You will betray me?"

"Certainly. You would have betrayed us; we will betray you. Good-night."

"You are going to leave me here?"

"Yes; for two weeks. We will come to see what is left of you at the end of the time named."

"I reckon it's time for me to get down to business now," said Ned.

He intended to enter the apartment and face the men, but the door near which he was standing opened, and the men stepped forth.

Ned attempted to dodge away, but he had been seen. He heard a curse, and a bullet whistled past his head.

His time had come. He turned.

The men had closed the door, and had stepped into the passage.

Ned commenced to blaze away; there came some answering shots, but they did not harm Old Ironsides. He was accustomed to that sort of scrimmage. He had fallen to the ground, and the assassins did not "tumble" until they were tumbled over.

The detective rarely wasted a shot. He was just old dead sure when it came to shooting.

The shooting lasted just a few real American seconds, and three more of the ghouls lay dead. The fiends would never again entice innocent victims to be murdered in the chamber of horrors.

Ned lay low a few moments after firing his last shot. He did not mean to be "played" as Ricetti had "played" him.

It was a strange fight, and a bloody and fatal one, conducted down there in that subterranean and vault-like passage.

A moment or two passed and Ned concluded he would investigate. He did not rise to his feet, however, but crawled to the spot where the three men lay in a heap.

Having assured himself that the men were dead Ned decided to enter the room of horrors and interview the treacherous scoundrel Ricetti.

Ned had no difficulty in opening the door, and he stepped into the room.

A strange odor filled his nostrils, and he had an idea as to what horrible purpose the subterranean chamber had been devoted.

The men had extinguished the light upon leaving the chamber of horrors.

Ned opened the slide of his masked lantern and flashed a glare in the face of Ricetti.

"Well, monsieur," said Ned, "I think you and I have met before, and by this time you must have learned that 'the way of the transgressor is hard!'"

Ned was very fond of getting off Scriptural quotations.

"The American!" ejaculated Ricetti.

"Yes, the American."

"You here?"

"Yes, and it's lucky for you, monsieur, that I am here, as those other felows promised you that you should not be disturbed for two weeks. You might have become very lonely in that time."

"I would rather meet death than you!" exclaimed Ricetti.

"Thank you," responded Ned. 'I am death to such rascals as you and your companions!"

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"I HEARD pistol-shooting!" said Ricetti.

"That is not strange," returned Ned, "seeing that a few shots were exchanged, and you were not far off at the time!"

"Who were you contending with?"

"It matters not; at present I am here to have a few words with you."

"You will release me?"

"I am not making any promises to-night."

"An American would not leave a man here to rot and die!"

"You have quite an admiration for the American character."

"You will not leave me here?"

"We will talk about your chances later on; at present I wish to ask you a few questions. The last time we met you were supposed to be a corpse!"

"I was only stunned."

"Stunned in the neck? well, well, it was a cunning trick, and we will not discuss it now. But what did you do with the girl?"

"I have her in my possession."

"Oh, you have?"

"Yes."

"I do not see her around here?"

"But I brought her here."

"You did, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where is she now?"

"Take me from here and I will tell you."

"I can't trust you, monsieur. I heard you say you had taken oaths that would reach a string from your feet to your lips, and that you were used to breaking your word!"

"You heard me say that, eh?"

"Yes."

"To whom was I talking?"

"The man who placed you in your present position."

"That declaration was meant for him."

"For him alone?"

"Yes. I was only defying him. I am a truthful man."

"Since when?"

"I always have been."

"A pity for you," muttered Ned in English.

"Now, my man, tell me, where is the girl?"

"You must promise to release me."

"What is a promise worth? I might promise, and break my word at will."

"An American will not break his promise."

"Ah! You are still giving me 'taffy.'" The last word was interlarded with the French declarations.

"I can lead you to the girl."

"You do not look like a man who could travel very far just at this moment."

The brigand was securely bound with ropes.

"Free me, and I will lead you to the girl.

"I will take you at your word."

"Enough. All I want is revenge."

Ned thought over the situation a moment, and decided to perform a certain act before releasing the man Ricetti.

The Italian had claimed that all he desired was an opportunity to work his revenge, and Ned feared that, should he discover that the men against whom he desired to work his revenge were dead he would not prove so good an ally.

The detective left the room and telegraphed to Rideau:

"All right."

The answer came "All right!"

Having removed the bodies Ned returned to the room where he had left Ricetti.

"You have come back?"

"Yes."

"I did not expect you."

"Why not?"

"You had me here; I feared you would leave me to die here."

"It may be I will; it depends upon how well you keep your word."

Ned unbound the cords that had held the brigand. The moment the latter was free and on his feet he sprung upon Ned.

The treacherous scoundrel would have murdered Ned had he been able to do so, but the fact was, our hero had been looking for some such show of treachery and was ready for the villain.

Our hero had his billy at hand, had it prepared for the business. Ricetti received a rap that brought him to his knees.

"Now, you scoundrel! you are on your knees once in your life! say your prayers!"

Ned did not desire to kill the man. He felt he might be of some service, but it was not any regard he felt for the villain's life that he spared him.

Ricetti was not disposed to surrender or give up the battle. He rose to his feet and threw himself upon Ned, and in so doing knocked the lantern from our hero's hand.

The men were in darkness.

Ned was equal to the occasion. He knew that the knife was the most formidable weapon under all the circumstances, and he leaped to one side.

"Aha, you fear me!"

Ned did not speak. He did not desire to betray his exact location, as the man might be armed with a pistol and down him.

Ned could have dropped Ricetti, but he was willing to take long chances and disarm the man and utilize him.

It became a sort of tragic walk-around in the darkness.

The Italian evidently misunderstood Ned's design, and had come to feel that the American was seeking to get out of his way.

Old Ironsides, as our readers know, was just the man to get out of any other man's way. Oh, yes; but as the case stood, it was not "this evening, but some other time, my love."

"I will kill you!" said the Italian.

He did not say much after that, however, as Ned's club cut short any further immediate boasting.

As the man went down Ned reached down and secured his lamp, and flashing the light in Ricetti's eyes, he said:

"Well, you are a nice scoundrel!"

The man answered in a feeble voice:

"I give it up! You are too many for me."

"I would serve you right to leave you here, you villain!"

"Kill me, but do not leave me here!"

"Why did you make an attack upon the man who did you a service?"

"Oh, I wanted to escape."

"I had said you should."

"No, sir; you declined to make any promise."

"You are a cunning rascal!"

Ned put a pistol to the man's ear, and said:

"Have you any message to leave?"

"Kill me and the girl will starve to death!"

Our hero had reason to believe that the Italian spoke the truth.

"If I spare you?"

"I will take you to the girl."

"So you promised me before."

"I will keep my promise this time."

"I will see that you do," said Ned.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE detective slipped a pair of handcuffs on the man's wrists.

The Italian offered no resistance; the fact was he did not feel well—he had a headache.

"Now, then," said Ned, "get up on your feet."

"Give me time to rest; I feel bad."

Ned drew a flask from his pocket containing some American whisky.

"Here, man, drink."

The Italian took a good drink, and in a jocular manner remarked:

"Had you asked me to drink sooner you and I would not have quarreled."

Ned took the remark as a compliment to American whisky.

Ricetti rose to his feet and said:

"We will go."

"Where?"

"To where the girl is confined."

"One moment, Ricetti; I would ask you a question, and I wish you to tell me the truth, as I can prove your words, sooner or later."

"What do you want?"

"Have you abused the mademoiselle since she has been in your possession?"

"No."

"So much the better for you, if your words prove true. Lead the way," said Ned.

The Italian, with his hands meekly folded (the manacles were responsible for the meek attitude), led the way.

Ned, meantime, had signaled up to Rideau.

"All right."

The answering signal came, as usual:

"All right."

Ricetti appeared to know the route down where the ghouls had constructed a regular suite of apartments underground.

Ned was perfectly amazed at the sights that were revealed to him.

The writer, during his visit to Paris, saw workmen digging the foundations where an old house had stood. A series of underground chambers had been disclosed by the industrious workmen, when a by-stander asked as to the meaning of the rooms way down under ground. The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and answered he did not know what it meant. The wondering public were left to draw their own conclusions. But one man, who appeared to be posted, said.

"That is where the celebrated Cartouche used to live!"

Cartouche, as our readers will remember, was the famous Paris robber who for so long a time defied the whole power of the old-time monarchical government of France.

Some day, when a certain building in Paris is torn down, similar remains of a subterranean department will be discovered.

Rideau, the French detective, at a later period, when talking to the American, said that it was his belief that the underground chamber of the ghouls was merely the utilization of some old wine cellar, which, by their ingenuity, they had transformed into a series of underground chambers.

Ricetti walked along for a short distance, and said, as he stopped and put his manacled hands on the wall:

"Take off the wristlets and lend me your lantern."

"Not to-night, my son; some other evening, please."

"Then flash the light on the wall."

"With pleasure."

Ned did as directed, and the brigand soon pressed upon a spring; a door flew open and a room was disclosed.

Ricetti stepped into the room when a little curse fell from his lips.

"What is the matter now, my man?"

"She is gone!"

"Who is gone?"

Ned knew well enough whom the man meant when he put the question, but the fact was our hero had come to learn that Ricetti was a very cunning trickster. He did not take much stock in the fellow's word.

"The girl is gone!"

"Oh, she is!"

"Yes."

"Was she ever here?"

"She was."

"You want me to accept your word?"

"What reason would I have to deceive you now?"

"Well, I will tell you, you played dead man on me once."

"I had something to gain then."

"And now?"

"The game has gone against me. If the girl is not here I've no claim upon your clemency."

"You are right there, monsieur."

"She is gone."

"And she was here?"

"Yes."

"Who put her here?"

"I did."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Who could have taken her away?"

"The chief ghoul."

"The man who got the best of you in the other room?"

"Yes."

"He knew of her presence here?"

"Yes."

"Well, my friend, you just sit down there and I will look around."

"There is no need to look around; the girl is away."

"That is just the reason I wish to look around. You just make yourself easy. I'm doing this now."

Ned made a close study of the room. He got down and crawled along the damp floor. The Italian watched his peculiar movements with a great deal of interest.

Ned made a long search, and at length came to the conclusion that Ricetti was deceiving him, when the glare of his lamp made a certain revelation.

Our hero picked from the floor the leaf of a certain flower. The flower was rare, and Emily Salabert was in the habit of wearing one always in her hair.

The silent leaf told a loud tale.

The little leaf confirmed the statement of the brigand: it indicated that the delicate and beautiful Emily Salabert had really been an inmate of that den of horrors.

Ned had thought the other room the den of horror, but learned that the room Emily had occupied was the real den.

"She was here!" he muttered.

"You are a smart man!" said the Italian.

"Don't pay me any compliments, if you please," said Ned.

The detective spoke in a solemn voice.

"Why should I not compliment you?"

"Because some day I may be your executioner."

"You will kill me?"

"I should not be surprised, if you compel me to do so."

"Give me a fair chance and you can do so if you can."

"Why, you fool! you have had more than two or three fair chances!"

"I only ask one more."

"Well, remember, you shall have one more fair chance. But now tell me, where is the girl?"

"I do not know."

"Do you believe they injured her?"

"I do not, unless they have done it within the last hour."

"How long were they hid in the room there with you?"

"A number of hours."

"Then you can rest assured they have not killed the girl within an hour."

CHAPTER LXX.

"You appear positive," said the Italian.

"I have good reason to be positive; and now tell me when last did *you* see the girl?"

"Just before I entered that room where you found me."

You saw her just before you entered that room?"

Yes."

She was alive and well?"

"Yes."

"You talked with her?"

"Yes."

"Now, monsieur, listen to me. You are in a bad scrape; the chances are all against you. See here."

Ned showed the man the string he held in his hand.

"You see this?"

"I do."

"Do you know what it means?"

"I can guess."

"What do you guess?"

"Some one is at the other end of it."

"You are right; see here."

Ned pulled the string, signaling "All right."

There came an answering pull, responding "All right."

"Now, then," said Ned, "have you any idea who is at the other end of the string?"

"The Indian, Peter."

"A good guess; but Peter is not the man. Rideau, the detective, is at the other end of that string!"

Ricetti turned deathly pale, and, by the act, betrayed a singular phase of criminal characteristics. The man who had faced death twice within the hour—the man who had precipitated a life-and-death combat, showed more fear at the mention of Rideau's name than he had evinced upon either of the other occasions.

There is something terrible to a criminal in the idea of a legal execution of the death sentence.

"Aha! you turn pale?"

"Rideau is there?"

"Yes."

"You are a friend of Rideau?"

"I am."

"You are a detective?"

"It matters not who I am. I shall speak plainly to you."

"What would you say?"

"You may incline me to give you a chance."

"Give me a chance?"

"Yes."

"You can not fool me! you will never give me a chance!"

"You can not tell; you may do me a service."

"I can not do you a service now."

"Why not?"

"The girl is gone."

"She still lives?"

"I do not know."

"How many men are there in the ghoul gang?"

"Seven."

"Are you the seventh man?"

"No; I am the eighth."

"Then there were seven besides yourself?"

"I had just become a member."

"How was it you became a member?"

"I had their secret."

"How did you get their secret?"

"I fooled their captain. I made him believe, when he was in his cups, that I was a member of the gang, and he let out all to me, without knowing he was telling his tale to an outsider."

"How long have you been a member of the gang?"

"Two weeks."

"And there were seven besides you?"

"There are seven besides me."

"One left," remarked Ned, in a low tone in English.

"When you brought the girl here what did you do?"

"I will not tell."

"You prefer to tell your story to Rideau?"

"No."

"You must tell it to me or to him."

"I will tell it to you."

"Proceed."

"The dead game is an old game with me," said Ricetti. "You have read," he added, "about the man who simulated death in Italy and escaped from prison?"

"Yes."

"I am the man."

"If you had been an honest man you might have made your mark."

"I was an honest man once, and it did not pay."

"Has it paid you to be a dishonest one?"

"No; not in the long run."

"Well, you ought to have tried being honest to the long run."

"I will tell my tale."

"Go on."

"When I came the death game on you I overheard all that passed between you and Emily Salabert, and I made up my mind that you would be compelled to resort to some scheme to get rid of my body."

"I reckon it would have been better for you if you had been dead."

The brigand paid no attention to Ned's remark, but continued his story:

"The moment you had left the room, I rose to my feet and went into the adjoining room, and found the girl studying her own face in the mirror. She was amazed at her own ghost-like appearance."

"Poor girl!" muttered Ned.

"I crawled behind her," continued the brigand, "and she saw two faces in the glass, her own and the face of the dead man. The girl screamed, and I caught her in my arms; finding herself clasped in the arms of an apparition she fainted."

"A fortunate thing for her."

"Yes; it was a fortunate thing for me too, as matters were going. I carried the girl downstairs, secured a cab that chanced to be passing, and got her in before she returned to consciousness.

"She returned to consciousness in the cab, when I told her if she made a noise or spoke one word I would kill her.

"She was silent; indeed, I do not believe she had strength enough to cry out."

Ned shuddered at the cold-blooded manner in which the villain told his terrible tale.

"Did the cabman ask no questions?" demanded Ned.

"Ah!" laughed the man, "we were in France, in Paris; I gave the cabman a five-franc piece, and told him my own story, and he believed it five francs' worth."

"Did you bring the girl right here?"

"I did; when I left the cab a short distance from here she fainted again, and I came to the door of the house above without being discovered, and the girl was brought right to this room."

The man's story confirmed the statement of the woman whom Ned had first met when he forced an entrance into the house.

"Did the girl revive before you got her here?"

"She did, but fainted again."

"Well, when you got her here?"

"You overheard my proposition to her the night you were hidden in the closet?"

"I did."

"I repeated my proposition."

"Well?"

"She was a brave girl at the bottom, and she spurned me. Yes, spurned me!"

"She did right."

"Oh, yes, *you* may well say that; of course *you* can!"

"Why can I especially say she did right?"

The man laughed, and answered:

"Because Emily Salabert loves the American."

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE great, big Ned Balfour could have been knocked over with a feather.

The giant detective had made up his mind not to fall in love again. He had lost his heart once to learn, later on, that the love he craved had already been bestowed.

The idea of falling in love with Emily Salabert had never entered the giant detective's head; a burned child dreads the fire, and Ned had been badly burned. He had admired Emily Salabert; no man could have come into her presence and not have done so. She was, indeed, a ravishingly beautiful woman, young and accomplished, while Ned was a man of thirty-eight.

We have said that Ned was not a strikingly handsome man, and he was not; but he possessed a plain, manly face, glorious eyes, and a form which was a model of strength and symmetry.

His manners were off hand, but very engaging, and, withal, there was a certain magnetism about him—that same element in the disposition of some men which carries them to success and popularity without effort.

The brigand's announcement set Ned to thinking. It was a dangerous statement, for Ned was a susceptible fellow, despite his rough manliness.

"My friend," he said, "you need not give us any more of that!"

"The monsieur loves the lady?"

"I told you no more of that!"

"If the monsieur did not love the lady, why would he peril his life for her?"

The detective's hopes were let down a peg. He came to the conclusion that the fellow's first announcement was merely a surmise, based on the fact of our hero's devotion to the interests of the Mystery of Paris.

"The girl did not show an inclination to fall in love with you?"

"No; I tell you she scorned me! I threatened her with death and she defied me."

"She served you right!"

"I would have made her a good husband," said the man, with a sardonic laugh.

Ned felt like knocking the man down.

"I have heard enough," he said; "the girl is missing, and if she is not found alive, saltpetre will not preserve you!"

"They have removed the girl since I was in the other room."

"You are lying to me!"

"I am telling the truth, I swear!"

"I know you are telling me a falsehood!"

"No, no, I am telling the truth."

"I will convince you that you are lying."

"Do so."

"I will. Come!"

Ned led the way from the room, and proceeded along the passage to where the bodies of the three dead ghouls lay.

"Look there!"

The brigand did look, and a pallor overspread his villainous face.

The most hardened criminal will recoil in the presence of *fixed death*.

"Those fellows did not run off with the girl!"

"Who *settled* them?"

"I did."

"When?"

"The moment they left you; they would have settled me, and I settled them!"

"You are a bad man!"

"Remember that, while considering that you and I have some further business together."

"You have promised me a chance."

"You shall have a chance, the same chance those rascals had, and you will end your career as they have had theirs brought to a close!"

"I am not sorry for them; they were devils."

"And what are you?"

"I have killed *men* in open combat."

"I saw your knife raised against a helpless woman."

"I only intended to frighten her. I would not have harmed a hair of her head, monsieur."

"I wish I could believe what you say."

"Why?"

"It would be better for you in the long run. I might give you a better chance."

"I would make you my friend," said Ricetti.

"You would make me your friend?"

"Yes."

"I decline the proffered friendship. I can select my friends from a braver and truer class of men; but now you know that I am assured that you lied to me."

"I did not lie to you."

"You told me those men had removed the girl after you went into the room where I found you."

"I believed they did."

"But they could not have done so."

"I was not the only traitor."

"What do you mean?"

"The seventh man must have taken the girl while I was in that room."

"Did you ever see the seventh man?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"Louis Saranni."

"Will you describe his appearance?"

"He was a twin brother of one of the men. Study the face of that man, and you have the face of Louis Saranni."

Ricetti pointed to one of the bodies.

"You are telling me the truth?"

"I am. I have no object, only to gain your good will."

Ned did study the face of the man. It was a bad face; but the features were well defined, and he could readily have identified any living man who bore a resemblance to the dead one.

"We may find the girl yet," said Ned, "in some other chamber."

"There are no other chambers. She has been taken away."

"Your story is hard to believe."

"Why?"

"I have been in this house over two hours. I came here while the girl was here, according to your statement. She could not have been carried from the house since I have been here."

"The man would not have carried her through the house above."

"How would he have carried her?"

"He would have arranged for his plan."

"And how could he have carried her away?"

"Through the sewer."

"Ah, I see."

"What will you do with me?" demanded Ricetti.

"Rideau is above-stairs."

"You would hand me over to him?"

"Yes."

"You promised me a chance."

"A chance in case it ever became a life-and-death battle between you and me."

"I do not dare permit myself to fall into the hands of Rideau."

"How can you help it? You are my prisoner."

"I will ask a favor of you."

"What favor would you ask of me?"

"Put your pistol to my temple and blow out my brains. I prefer death to Rideau!"

CHAPTER LXXII.

"Is Rideau so terrible?"

"He is."

"You prefer death to being surrendered to him?"

"Yes."

"I must do my duty."

"I can be of service to you."

"How?"

"You have no revenge to work against me. I have done nothing, as far as you are concerned, that I can not undo."

"Well?"

"I know the haunts of Saranni."

"You would have me trust you?"

"I am a Corsican."

"Yes."

"If you spare my life you make me your slave; a Corsican's fealty under such circumstances is as enduring as his love of revenge!"

Ned had heard of the above characteristic in the Corsican character.

"You might serve me."

"I will serve you!"

"But I dare not trust you."

"Listen! I have lost my game; my game is to come from serving you, and besides, you are my adverse fate—my life would be in your hands!"

"What do you mean?"

"I could never prevail against you."

"But you might find the girl."

"If I did, I should come to you."

"What reason have I to believe that you would?"

"I could never escape you; if I carried the girl off, you would follow me to the end of the world; if I killed her I would only put the knife to my own heart; you would kill me!"

"You have a pretty clear view as to my possible movements."

"I have."

"Then if I spare you from Rideau, you will serve me?"

"I will."

"What will you do for me?"

"Track Saranni."

"And you will find him?"

"I will."

"See here, fellow, I will not swear you, for you have announced that you do not mind an oath."

"My word is better than my oath."

"I will try you."

"If you do you will never regret your decision; you shall have the girl and her fortune—the Salaberts never! They are treacherous. I owe them an old grudge. I entered their service to betray them. François Salabert once received a reward for my body. He should have known better than to have employed me. I sought revenge against him!"

Ned removed the manacles from Ricetti's wrists, handed him back his knife, and said:

"Show me how to ascend to the room above."

"Go to the room where you first found me, and you will find a door leading to the stone stairway down which you came."

"And you?"

"I must not meet Rideau."

"I will protect you."

"I know Rideau better than you do."

"What will you do?"

"Escape through the sewers."

"How can you?"

"The sewers will be open in a few hours. I can tell my own tale to the employés, if I am discovered, and will get away."

"Go!"

"We will meet again."

"When?"

"As soon as I have found Saranni."

"Enough, man; and if I recover the girl you shall receive money enough to lead an honest life the remainder of your days, if you so elect."

Ricetti moved away. After he had disappeared Ned muttered:

"I do not know whether I did right or not to trust that fellow; but I have known cases where, under similar circumstances, good has come of clemency like mine."

The detective re-entered the room where he had first discovered the ghouls, and after a moment he succeeded in finding the door of which Ricetti had spoken.

"The rascal told me the truth here!" said Ned.

Our hero opened the door, passed along a good passage, and came to another door, which he opened, when he found himself at the foot of the stairs down which he had first descended. Old Ironsides ascended the stairs, and saw Rideau standing at the top like a faithful watch-dog.

"Do you know how long you have been gone?" asked the French detective.

"No."

"You have been gone three hours."

"So long?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have well employed my time."

"Did you find the girl?"

"No."

"I did not think you would."

"I have found something for you, however."

The detective told his wonderful tale to the Frenchman.

Rideau listened with a countenance fixed with astonishment.

When Ned had concluded, Rideau said:

"Why did you let Ricetti go?"

"That I might catch Saranni."

"You should have consulted with me."

"Had I waited to consult with you, I should not have made the discovery."

"I recall my words."

"All right; now what will you do?"

"Explore the place below."

"First we must let another bird loose."

"Who?"

"The woman."

"No."

"I say yes."

"But I am Rideau."

"And I am Ned Balfour."

"Enough! you shall have your way."

"I must have my way."

"We will want the woman as a witness."

"You will have no prisoner; the gang are all dead but one."

"The woman shall go."

"She must go at once!"

The two men went to the room where the woman had remained secured during those weary hours. Ned said to her:

"I promised you your freedom?"

"You did."

"I will keep my word."

"You will release me?"

"Yes."

"Thank you! I shall always remember you!"

"Where will you go?"

"I know not now."

"You must make one promise."

"Name it."

"You will report to Rideau."

"And he will hold me?"

"No."

"Will he promise?"

Rideau said:

"I will promise!"

"Enough, I will report."

The French detective and the woman held a few moments' whispered conversation. Ned thought it a little off color that they should whisper under all the circumstances, but, as his interest did not hang upon the woman's movements, he said nothing; all he had done was to make good his promise.

The woman was released, but did not go at once. She pretended that she had some clothing to pack, and Ned discerned that she had another design.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

OUR hero and the detective left the room; once outside, Ned said:

"That woman must be watched!"

"But it was yourself who insisted upon her being released!"

Ned was a cute fellow, and he said:

"You are a dull man, Rideau."

"What do you mean?"

"A caged bird can not fly to its nest."

"Explain."

"There must be treasure in this house."

"You are right! Indeed you know more in a moment than myself in an hour; the woman will seek to take the treasure!"

"That's my idea."

"We will 'pipe' her."

"That is just what we must do!" said Ned.

"It is getting along toward morning," suggested Rideau.

"All the better; we will have assistance should we need it."

"Where?"

"In the sewers."

The two men waited a few moments; the woman came and peeped into the room where they stood.

"Go down!" said Ned, in a whisper.

The detective obeyed, and Ned followed.

The men remained down but a few moments, when they reascended.

"Leave it to me," said the American, and on tiptoe he left the room.

Ned proceeded to the upper story of the house, and arrived just in time to verify his suspicion.

The woman had just taken a box from a secret closet. The detective's hand rested heavily upon her shoulder.

The woman uttered a scream.

"Aha!" said Ned, "you have a little worldliness left, I see."

The detective had opened the box and found it filled with gold and silver ornaments, diamonds, jewels, and money.

"You will not need these in a convent," said Ned.

"They are mine."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, yes, they are mine. You must not take them from me."

"I shall take them," said Ned.

"You must not!"

"I did not put much faith in your pious resolutions, my good woman."

"The jewels are mine!"

"How did they become yours?"

"They are my pay."

The woman's remark carried a horrible suggestion.

"You can take the money," said Ned—"no more."

"I will take all!"

"No."

"I will appeal to the law."

Ned fixed his eyes upon her, and in his peculiar manner answered:

"All right. You shall appeal to the law, and abide by the law's decision. You are my prisoner!"

The woman wilted.

"Give me the money."

"No. You shall have all the law allows you."

"I will accept you as the judge."

"You are too late!"

"No, no; give me the money and let me go."

"I will give you some advice, the same advice Hamlet gave to Ophelia: 'Go to a nunnery, go to a nunnery!'"

"That is my intention."

"I do not believe it was your purpose. Mark me, if you remain in the world you will yet come to a fearful end. Remember the dead men down-stairs."

"I swear I meant to give all to the church."

"You do swear?"

"I do."

"You will be satisfied so long as the church gets the wealth."

"I will."

"So be it. I will be your almoner. The church shall have all for its poor fund."

"You will give me the money?"

"Yes."

Ned gave the money to the woman and said:

"Now go."

The woman went forth from that house of horrors in the gray of the morning, and like the Arab silently stole away.

We will here state that later on Ned discovered that only part of the story told to him was true; and he also learned in time that the woman did enter a convent and shut herself from the world forever.

Our hero placed the box where he could find it at the proper time, and joined Rideau.

"Did you catch her?"

"Yes."

"What was she after?"

"Her savings."

"You took the money from her?"

"No."

"You let her carry it off?"

"Yes."

"Was it a large amount?"

"No."

Ned did not see fit to tell even Rideau of the really valuable treasure he had received. Our hero had discerned the French detective's weakness.

The two men descended into the subterranean apartment, and made a most thorough examination.

Ricetti had told Ned that there were no more chambers, but the two detectives did find a chamber of ghastly records.

The chief ghoul had been a strange assassin—a singular fancy had induced him to keep relics belonging to his many victims, and attached to the relics were their names and the dates of their deaths.

It was an odd freak for such a monumental monster.

Some of the relics were rings of value, with initials inscribed on the inner side; other mementoes were of less value, but something had been preserved from the effects of every victim.

The chamber of ghastly relics told a strange, silent, and horrible tale.

It proved how both rich and comparatively poor had been enticed to death; the proof was in the value of some of the relics.

The two detectives were amazed and horrified at the "find." It was a museum such as may never again be found on earth, and it is to be hoped that such never will be again revealed.

"Well," remarked Ned, when the real nature of the discovery had been fully defined, "this gets me! I've met with strange and ghastly experiences in my time, but this goes beyond anything that ever came under my observation."

"I can join you there," said Rideau; "as a detective in France, I have met with possibly stranger experiences than you have; but I must say that this is the most wonderful of all my experiences."

"What shall we do with our 'find'?" asked Ned.

"You promised me the honor of this achievement."

"And I will keep my word. I never wish to be known as having had a hand in it: but you must assume the responsibility of the deaths."

"I will assume all responsibility."

"And what will you do?"

"Bring the Prefect of the Seine to behold what Rideau has done for Paris and its citizens."

The men continued their investigations; they left the chamber of ghastly records as they had found it, and pressed on for other monstrous developments.

Their continued search was rewarded in a remarkable manner, and the chief ghoul was proved to be an extraordinary criminal.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

NED BALFOUR took the lead in making the discoveries. He proved himself to possess all the acuteness and sagacity of the sleuth-hound. He pressed on until he found another chamber, and here was discovered a second ghastly museum of records.

The leader of the French thugs had evidently been a miser, as, in the second chamber, the men found a great treasure.

It would have appeared that the man had gobbled all, and had aimed to become one of the great magnates of France.

A diary which Ned found told the horrid tale; and it also embodied the hopes, aspirations, and secret thoughts of the most terrible criminal who ever disgraced the form of humanity.

There have been unearthed but one or two parallels to the discovery of Ned Balfour.

The Bender family of Kansas were ghouls on a smaller scale; still, as far as they went, their atrocities equaled the terrible bloodiness of the French underground assassins; but, counting the number of innocent victims who had been immolated in that underground den of horror and blood, the tale which it has been our duty to record, in fearfulness surpasses all similar organized deeds of secret crime.

Rideau showed a desire to seize the treasure, but a gentle hint from Ned made him honest.

"You will receive a reward in money and honors sufficient to pay you, Rideau."

"Did you think I had any idea of appropriating this blood-stained money?"

"Oh, no. I only wished to encourage you," said Ned in French, and in English he added, "to remain honest."

The diary of the chief ghoul was a strange study. Some of the entries, in their cold-blooded atrocity, were simply appalling.

The man's name was Baron, and he appeared to have been a native of Paris.

The treasure-chamber was left as it was found, and the two men continued their investigations, but discovered nothing more worthy of record.

They had found enough, however, for one generation—sufficient to serve as the monumental crime of a century.

The two men reascended to the upper house.

They passed through the building, but nothing of moment rewarded their search, save several contrivances for the disposal of doomed victims.

It was decided to close the house and leave. Rideau said he would bring the prefect of police to view what had been found.

It was daylight when the two men issued from the house of blood and crime, and a moment later these two remarkable men were passing along the street in the midst of the throngs of people to be met with at all hours of the day in great Paris.

Little did the people among whom these two men moved dream of the wonderful adventures through which they had passed.

Ned had met Peter, and to the Indian he told the ghastly tale.

Peter was amazed, but his whole soul was fixed upon the recovery of the missing Emily.

"We will find her!" said Ned.

"I fear not. You should never have trusted that villain Ricetti."

"You are a cute fellow, Peter, but I've had a little experience in this world—it's dog eat dog. You wait and see."

Ned was tired and wearied, and he sought his home with old Rabe, determined to have a good day's sleep.

He had made certain arrangements with Rideau, which guaranteed the safety of all the valuables belonging to the Mystery of Paris.

It was night when the detective once more issued from his lodgings, for an indulgence in a fresh lot of adventures.

The first thing that attracted his attention upon appearing upon the street was the shouts of the newsboys.

Paris has about as many news-venders as any city in the world, and they are an active class of people.

"Aha!" muttered Ned, "the discovery has been given forth!"

He bought one of the papers, and without a single feeling of envy read that Rideau, the French detective, was the greatest man in the world.

The detective's (Rideau's) terrible struggle down in the subterranean apartments was described in the most graphic manner; and descriptions of the appearance of the dead ghouls were furnished.

From the paper Ned learned that the dead men had been carried to the morgue, and a regiment of soldiers was required to keep back the crowds of people who were seeking admission.

A regiment was also stationed around the house which had served as the *entrée* to the underground chambers of horrors.

It had been an exciting day in Paris.

Ned took in the whole things. He felt proud in his own mind in having been the instrument for the breaking up of such a crib of monstrosities, but he did not crave any public honor or recognition.

The detective wished to find Saranni. He did hope to meet Ricetti. He did not wish to learn that he had been a fool in trusting to the brigand.

Ned was going along the street, when he was attracted by a crowd standing at the entrance-passage leading to the court of a hotel. He stood there just long enough to learn that it was one of those wrangles over nothing, so common all over France.

For jaw, the French people can beat the world, but they never strike.

Our hero passed along a way, where he saw a face that he recognized.

"Halloo!" he remarked to himself, "there goes my old friend, Sir Henry Falden."

The Irishman turned into a hotel, and Ned followed.

The detective had nothing particular on hand at the moment. He was waiting to hear from his man Peter, or Ricetti, the brigand.

The moment had not arrived for Ned to set out on the trail.

It was a strange thing, but our hero always appeared to be on hand when there was anything really exciting going on.

We have met men in our time who appeared to be followed by the same fate; they were always on deck when there was a row or scrimmage.

Ned had no reason for following Sir Henry Falden. He had trailed the man for fun, but the idle trail led to the saving of a human life, to the prevention of a tragedy, and Ned was about the right man to be on deck at the time.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE detective was standing upon the raised side-walk surrounding the court of the hotel on the inner side, when he saw a man issue from the hotel.

The man's appearance was not adapted to attract any particular attention, were it not for an incident that immediately followed his sortie from the hotel.

As the gentleman stepped out, the door opened behind him and another man came forth. Now there was nothing unusual in the latter incident, as men were passing in and out the grand entrance every moment; but a wonderful man chanced to see a little maneuver that caused him to step forward toward the gentleman who had first issued forth.

Ned had seen an expression upon the face of the second man, which, to him, was peculiarly suggestive.

It was well for a good man that the American detective chanced to be at the point named at the moment.

The elderly man had just crossed the court, and was stepping to the raised walk when the second man sprung forward.

Ned Balfour's great arm shot forth, his brawny fist landed on the cheek of a would-be assassin, and the latter went down like a flash.

As the man fell Ned leaped forward, and the reason of the blow was explained to the amazed loungers standing and sitting around.

The whole tragic incident had transpired in a few brief American seconds, as Ned was wont to say.

Before the assassin could recover his feet two policemen had leaped forward and seized him.

Ned stood by as cool as a cucumber, and did not at all act like a man who had performed a heroic deed.

It was a heroic act, however, and one which could only have been performed by a man of courage and wonderful coolness.

The gentleman whose life had been attempted had turned just in time to behold Ned's actions. At the same moment the gentleman caught sight of the face of his intending murderer.

He ran to Ned, handed him a card, and said:

"I owe you my life! Come and see me at my room."

The gentleman hastened away, and in the excitement that ensued Ned also flitted.

Ned knew, from what had occurred, that there was a story back of the tragedy.

The detective glanced at the card he had received.

In pencil was written:

"I leave to-night. Call at once!"

Our hero had just made up his mind to go and call on the gentleman for a solution of the mystery, when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and upon turning, beheld the gentleman whose life he had saved.

"You are the man who saved my life?"

"I am the man who downed the rascal who would have stabbed you to death."

"You are an American?"

"Yes."

"So am I."

"Why did the man seek your life?"

"I will tell you. He has followed me from Spain."

"Ah! He looked like a Spaniard."

"I have been traveling with my wife and daughter. We met the scoundrel in Madrid. He claims to be a nobleman, a Spanish grandee of some sort or other, and he had the impudence to fall in love with my child. Now, some Americans may fancy the idea of marrying their children to foreign noblemen, but I am not one of that sort. I'd rather see my child dead than become the victim, the wife-victim of any nobleman, prince, or other high-born nincompoop in Europe."

"You have got the right idea of it, oh, my countryman!" said Ned.

"I just have. Well, this fellow began to annoy my child, and one night he met us on the street, and his actions were such that I was compelled to knock him down!"

"Bully for you!" said Ned, enthusiastically.

"I gave him just what he deserved, a good drubbing."

"If some other American fathers that I know had done the same thing," said Ned, "they would have saved their children from many after-years of misery, neglect and suffering."

"You are right; but I see the fellow has followed me and meant to take my life."

"That was his game."

"I am glad that one of my own countrymen has placed me under this great obligation."

"Well, I am just glad that I happened to be around to give that fellow a sockdologer!"

"I do not wish to offend you, sir, but would a few thousands be of any benefit to you?"

"No, sir-ree, I've lots of it."

"I am glad you are independent; but some day I may do you a service. You have my card, and I will write on it my address in America."

Ned handed over the card, and the gentleman wrote an address.

"You are sure I can not serve you in any way?"

"I am sure, sir."

"I leave town within a few moments."

"You will not remain to prosecute the villain who would have killed you?"

"No."

"He may follow you to America."

"I hope he may. He will get out of the U. S. so fast that he will feel like trying to swim all the way to Spain."

"Well, sir, I hope we may meet again."

"I trust we may."

"I am glad to have met one American who is not a fool," said Ned.

"How so?"

"A man who will marry his daughter only to one who loves her."

"When you meet my daughter you will find an American girl who is not a fool—a girl who would not marry any other prince but some good American of real pluck and snap and generosity; but good-bye, sir. Again, I say, may we meet again."

As the gentleman moved off, Ned reverently ejaculated:

"Thank Heaven!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

NED was not what might be called a bigoted American, but he did have just a little partiality for things and persons of his own nationality, and his ejaculation of "Thank Heaven!" as recorded at the close of the preceding chapter, was not so much a prayer of thankfulness for a life saved, as it was for the whole combination of incidents.

Ned had seen considerable American toadyism since his sojourn on the European side of the Atlantic, and it was just refreshing to meet with a genuine, whole-souled American, who fully realized that a good, healthy, pure-blooded American lad, raised on a farm with his good morals and excellent constitution, was far nobler than some effeminate, impure blooded, immoral son of the same sort of a daddy.

Ned, about nine o'clock, jumped into a *fiacre* and drove to the quarter where he had played the rôle of the vagrant the previous evening. It was his idea that he might meet with Ricetti.

The detective still felt a little shaky as to the wisdom of his course in letting the fellow go. He had heard the man declare that he regarded not an oath.

Our hero had changed his appearance. He had gone into an entirely new disguise. Ned entered a *café*, and in a few moments saw Peter enter. The Indian had gone under cover, and his disguise was a most excellent one.

Peter was a very shrewd and cunning fellow, and upon entering the saloon he glanced around, scanning the faces of all in the room. He ran his eye over the American and failed to recognize him. Ned was amused; it was quite a satisfaction to be able to get himself up so well that even a sharp fellow like Peter could not "take in" his cover.

"I reckon I'll have a little fun with Peter," thought Ned.

The American was incorrigible as a jokist; danger or scenes of horror never lessened his appetite for fun.

Peter took a seat. He had determined to await the coming of his friend.

Ned managed to take a seat near the Indian, and, watching his opportunity, dropped a card before the man.

Peter, at the moment, was intently watching another man, and when he turned around and saw the card, a look of dismay settled upon his face.

The card read as follows:

"Lay low; your man is not far off.

"A FRIEND."

Peter looked around in every direction. He was mortified. He knew that some one was present who had the advantage of him. There was a man in the room who had gone under his disguise while he had failed to go under the disguise of the other party, whoever it might be.

Peter grew very uneasy. Even with the hint he had received he was still at fault. He determined to draw the man from his hole. Peter rose from his seat and left the *café*. Ned did not follow. He well knew Peter would return. In a few moments Peter did return, and once more his dark eyes were shot around the room and fixed upon the features of all therein gathered.

He was still at fault. Ned was too well got up for him.

A moment passed and a third party entered the room.

The third man was a fine-looking, dark-faced man, elegantly dressed.

Ned was amazed. The handsome, gentlemanly looking man was Ricetti, the brigand.

The American did not recognize him at first, but after a moment succeeded in doing so, aided by a certain little peculiarity which he had observed in the brigand's manner, and which evidently was a secret exclusively his own.

"I have spotted you; now let me see if you can spot me," was the mental conclusion of Ned.

The disguise which had baffled Peter, baffled Ricetti also. The Italian only remained in the saloon a few moments, when he passed out once more.

Ned moved over beside Peter and whispered in his ear:

"You remain here."

Peter started and uttered an involuntary exclamation.

"It's all right," said Ned.

"I would not have known you."

"Never mind; it is all right!"

"One of the Salaberts is in the neighborhood," said Peter.

"When did you see him?"

"About an hour ago."

"All right; if he comes in here keep your eye upon him."

"You will return?"

"Yes."

Ned glided from the *café*; his conversation with Peter had only occupied a few seconds, and upon passing to the street he saw the form of Ricetti.

The American moved forward and placed his hand on the brigand's shoulder.

"Good-evening, Ricetti!"

"Ah! you are here!"

"Yes."

"I would not have known you."

"I am here, and I am glad you have come to meet me."

"You doubted my coming?"

"No; but I am never certain, you know, except when I experience accomplished facts."

"I am bound to be true to your interests."

"So much the better for you."

"I need your service."

"What can I do for you?"

"I am to fight a duel."

"You fight a duel!"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Within an hour."

"Who with?"

"Saranni."

"You have found the man?"

"Yes."

"And you are to fight him?"

"Yes."

"Has he the girl?"

"I do not know; I fight him to find out."

"I do not understand."

"Saranni does not know me. I have been on his track all day; the man is playing the rôle of an Italian count in Paris, and I am playing count against him. He knows that I am a fraud, and he knows that I know he is one; so it's diamond cut diamond."

"This is a funny arrangement."

"It is a good one. I insulted Saranni in the presence of some friends. I did it on purpose."

"What was your object?"

"It was the most direct way of finding the girl. I will kill him; before he dies he will confess. He would never open his mouth under any other circumstances!"

"But you could have trailed him to his lair."

"I did."

"Well?"

"The girl is not in his possession."

"You have established that fact?"

"I have not established it, but I am satisfied of it in my own mind."

"What leads you to the conclusion?"

"The fact of his remaining in Paris."

"He was one of the ghouls?"

"Yes; and unless he had some good game on hand he would not remain."

"Can it be possible he has dickered with the Salaberts?"

"I do not know; I will take his confession from his dying lips!"

"But he may kill you?"

"Yes; and that is the reason I wish you to act as my second; where I fail *you must win!*"

CHAPTER LXXVII.

NED'S eyelids drooped. The detective was doing a little rapid thinking. There was something that smacked of keen-witted Italianism in the story of Ricetti.

Ned was not the man to be caught napping. Ricetti may have laid in with Saranni, and the whole scheme might be merely a game to "nip" the American, and get him out of the way.

Ned did not propose to fall an easy victim.

"I think you could have gone a shorter way to work about it."

"No; I have taken the proper measures."

"Why did you not come and consult me?"

"I am consulting you now. If you do not approve the game, we can go upon some other 'tack.' It makes no difference to me, but I tell you I know my man pretty well."

"It appears a very roundabout method for gaining a point."

"Very well, I will let it go; but I tell you it is the most direct manner for getting at any facts in his possession."

"Will you go and point out this fellow, Saranni, to me?"

"I will."

"At once?"

"Yes."

"How will I reach him?"

"Easy enough. You are to act as my second. You will call upon him. He awaits the coming of a friend from me."

Again Ned became thoughtful.

The duel might be only a "blind," and the game might be to have him occupy the position of a friend—the little "joker" being the visit as a friend.

"Where is this man to be found?"

"At the Continental Hotel. He is blooming out in grand style."

"How does he dare to do so under all the circumstances?"

"It is a safety game. He has been playing a double rôle in Paris. He got his supplies as the ghoul. He spent his money as the Count Nasatti."

"When did you discover all this?"

"To-day since I have been on his track."

"You did not know it before?"

"You must remember I had just joined the ghouls. I joined them to betray them. I had never seen Saranni but once; we were not acquainted."

"Your story is a strange one, but appears reasonable."

"I see you distrust me."

"Well, yes, I do."

"The time will come when you will not. You spared my life. I may not live long, but I will not forget one friend while I do live."

"If you act honestly by me you will become a comparatively rich man."

"If I had a certain amount of money I would turn honest man."

"Then you have a conscience?"

"No; but it's very inconvenient to be a rogue. It does not pay, and it's a hard life to be always tracked and hunted like a wolf."

In a few words Ricetti had presented a great truth. It does not *pay* to be a rogue; and the life of a criminal is a hard one, the hardest life on earth.

It is the experience of detectives that, nine times out of ten, rogues whom they have run down would have preferred to have been honest men, but once having been criminals, the chances were all against them.

Old Ironsides had many times talked with criminals, who in different words had expressed about the same idea as Ricetti.

The life of a criminal is a hard life. He is an eternal curse to himself. He enjoys nothing save the very excess of vice, and there is no real happiness in vice.

We would advise our young readers to lay well to heart the words of Ricetti; his confession was a confirming testimony to the good old scriptural injunction. "The way of the transgressor is hard."

"You would prefer to be an honest man, then, Ricetti?"

"I would; and I had always made up my mind that if I could once make a good 'stake,' I would go to some country where I was not known, and lead a peaceful life."

"If you are true to me, you shall have that opportunity."

"I will be true to you, and you will be satisfied of that fact before to-morrow's sunrise!"

"This Count Nasatti is living at the Continental?"

"Yes."

"He is known by that name?"

"Yes."

"How long has he lived there?"

"A few weeks only."

"Have you discovered where he lived before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Hotel Normandy."

"He is well known at the latter hotel?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I will call on him in your behalf."

Ricetti gave Ned all necessary directions, and our hero proceeded to go to the Continental Hotel. Ricetti was to await his return.

Ned went first to the Hotel Normandy. He sought the porter in his office, and inquired for the Count Nasatti.

"He does not live here now."

"Where does he live?"

"At the Hotel Continental."

Ned slipped a five-franc piece into the porter's willing hand, and asked:

"What sort of a man is the count?"

The porter glanced around before answering, but at length he said, in a cautious manner:

"I do not know much about him."

"Did he live here long?"

"About two months."

"What is your idea?"

"He is a strange man; never has much to say to any one, but he is very rich."

"Very rich?"

"Yes."

"Was he here regularly?"

"No; sometimes we would not see him for two or three days, and then he would come back. He never received any letters, never sent any from the hotel. He was a very strange man."

Ned was going slow. He did not mean to be caught in any trap; as far as he had inquired, Ricetti's story appeared to be confirmed.

Ned proceeded to the Hotel Continental. It was after ten o'clock. He inquired for the Count Nasatti, and his card was carried up.

Ned, a few moments later, was ushered into a grand apartment and into the presence of a handsomely dressed man.

"You come from—?" said the count, in a very polite tone.

Ned made no answer, but glanced around the room. He saw a door which appeared to lead into an adjoining apartment.

The Count Nasatti fixed a keen glance upon our hero, and repeated his question:

"You come from the Count ——?"

"Is any one in that room?" demanded Ned, abruptly.

"What difference does it make to you?"

"None to me; but it may make some difference to you!" was the singular reply.

An angry look came into the Count Nasatti's eyes, as he said:

"Who are you, and why have you come here?"

"You have not answered my question. Is there any one in that room?"

"I say, what difference does it make to you?"

"I repeat, none to me; but it may make a great difference to you."

"You are impertinent. I will have you ejected from the hotel!"

"Oh, no; you will not."

"Do you come from Count ——?"

"No."

"Whom do you represent?"

"I will tell you. I come *from Monsieur Rideau, friend Saranni!*"

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

"I got him dead that time!" muttered Ned in English, as the false count reeled backward with a look of blank astonishment and terror upon his face.

Ned was working a little plan of his own. He did not fancy Ricetti's plan of the duel. He thought he had a shorter road to the accomplishment of his end.

The Italian was a gamey man. He recovered from his first surprise and whipped out a pistol.

His intent was good. He would have shot our hero, have coolly opened his door, and summoned the police, and would have said:

"This man attempted to kill me. I killed him!"

The word of the count would have been accepted. He might have been put under bail, but that would have ended the case practically.

Ned knew all about that little arrangement, and he upset the calculation.

"Don't shoot, count," he said.

The count made the discovery that he was *too late.*

"You come from Rideau?"

"Yes."

"What have I to do with you or Rideau?"

"If you have nothing to do with us, why that pistol in your hand?"

"I am a nobleman. I have a right to shoot down an insulter!"

"You are a nobleman?"

"I am the Count Nasatti."

"Oh, you are!"

"I am."

"If you are, I have made a mistake."

"You have made a mistake, a most grievous one, and both you and Rideau will be called to an account."

"Will you remain in Paris long enough to call us to an account?"

The man was puzzled. He did not understand Ned's last remark.

"It's strange," said Ned, "that I should have made such a mistake; but we have a photograph of the man we are after, and if you are not Saranni, you certainly will be willing to go with me and compare your face with the picture?"

"You insult me!"

"Do I?"

"You had better be careful."

"My dear count, this is all a matter of business with me. I wish to be careful, and that is the reason I am not disposed to take your word without making the comparison of faces I have named."

"I will not be insulted in this manner! I shall ring for assistance!"

"Ring if you choose, but if you do, I shall take you with me by force."

"You dare not use force to me, the Count Nasatti, even though you may be Rideau himself!"

"If you think I dare not use force—ring!"

"But, sir, possibly I can convince you that you are mistaken."

"*Possibly* you can."

"I will go with you to the people who know me."

"The Hotel Normandy?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that would not amount to anything. I know more about you than the people do at the Hotel Normandy. Why have you not claimed your twin-brother's body from the morgue?"

The man turned deathly pale.

"It's no use, Saranni, you are the man I am after!"

"It's false!"

"You shall come with me!"

"Wait."

"Well?"

"I may yet convince you that I am the Count Nasatti."

"Impossible! we waste time!"

The man put his hand in his pocket, and drew forth at least a hundred unset diamonds. It was a glittering handful he held toward the detective.

"Look!" he said.

"I see."

It was a small fortune in the palm of a man's hand.

"Will all these convince you that I am not Saranni?"

"No; not all those."

"What is your price?"

"I have no price."

"Impossible! You are a *Frenchman and not have a price!*"

"I have no price. But tell me where is the girl you stole from the subterranean chamber?"

"Girl I stole from the subterranean chamber?"

"Yes; the girl you stole from the subterranean chamber."

There was a look of surprise upon the man's face.

"I do not know what you mean!"

"That will not do for me."

The pretended count was thoughtful a moment, but at length he said:

"Will you let me show you what I will pay for one hour's time?"

"No."

"Then we must fight. I will never be carried from this room alive!"

The man spoke in a tone that plainly indicated that he meant all he said.

Ned did not like the turn the affair was taking. He did not wish to be killed, that was certain, and he did not wish to kill the false count then and there.

"Count, you can save your life, and get away with your wealth, as far as I am concerned, on one condition."

"What is the condition?"

"You shall tell me where you have the girl concealed."

"I do not know what you mean."

The man spoke in a sincere tone. Ned calculated he would deny having the girl in his possession, but our hero could always tell when a man was lying; the false count, however, spoke in a tone like a man who was telling the truth.

"You know that a girl was brought to the place where you entered the ghoul apartments?"

"I know nothing about the girl."

"Did you not see her there?"

"I never saw her there, simply because I was never there myself."

"That will not do, Saranni; our account will be settled in this room, and your chances turn on your ability to aid me to recover the missing girl. You need not attempt further to deny your own identity. I can ring that bell, holding you at my mercy, and when the police come, say:

"'Here is Saranni! take him!'"

"If I tell you of the girl?"

"If you tell me of the girl, I have no more business with Saranni."

"Why not?"

"I am not telling why not; it is sufficient that such is the fact."

"I am to understand that if I tell you about the girl I am free?"

"As far as I am concerned, yes."

"You have come to me with a lie!" said the false count suddenly.

"A lie?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"You said you came from Rideau. If you came from Rideau you would not set me free. If you did not come from Rideau, you came with a falsehood."

"I did come from Rideau; but, independent of Rideau, I have a purpose of my own. I let you go, not Rideau."

"I know nothing about the girl."

"Then I must do my duty."

"You will never arrest me!"

"You prefer a combat?"

"I prefer anything to arrest."

"Then why not surrender?"

"Do you suppose I would hold the secret of a girl's whereabouts against my freedom? I tell you I know nothing about the girl you are talking about."

Ned began to believe the man was telling the truth.

The detective had taken a seat upon entering the room; but he suddenly sprung to his feet.

Saranni knew the critical moment had arrived. He raised his weapon, but he never pulled the trigger.

Ned's old reliable spoke first.

At the same moment the door was thrown open, and a man rushed into the room, to whom Ned coolly remarked.

"He was the last of the rascals."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE man who had rushed into the room was Rideau.

"Who is he?" demanded the French detective.

"Saranni."

There was an immediate excitement in the house, but Rideau was king. He sent for a policeman, and declared himself.

To Ned he had whispered:

"I will take the responsibility."

Rideau was compelled to give an account of his deeds, but to no excited public, to no petty or superior judge. He made his report to the chief prefect, and the latter made a report to the minister having supreme command in the department of justice, and the matter, as far as the public were concerned, was at an end.

The two detectives left the hotel together.

Once on the street, and away from the gaze of the curious crowd, Ned asked, "How happened it you were at hand?"

"You passed me when you entered the court of the hotel."

"And you recognized me?"

"I did, at a glance!"

"I am glad to be permitted to pay you a high compliment."

"Well?"

"You are the only man in France who could have recognized me."

"Recognitions have been the study of my life."

"And of mine."

"What did you get out of the fellow?"

"Nothing."

"How did you come to kill him?"

"He would have killed me."

"He would rather be killed by you than to have been surrendered to me."

"Why?"

"He would have been put to the rack, and he knew it."

"I will leave you," said Ned.

The two men separated. Rideau asked no questions.

Ned retraced his steps to where he had left Ricetti.

The American was convinced that Ricetti was one of the longest-headed scoundrels he had ever met in all his life.

Of one fact the detective felt assured. Saranni had not known anything of the whereabouts of Emily Salabert; and if he knew nothing about the girl, who did?

The detective formed his own conclusion. He was satisfied that the Corsican was up to a deep game.

To himself the detective muttered:

"All right. He is a good man as a trickster, and his cunning would do credit to Machiavelli, but let him fool me, *if he can!*"

We surmise that our readers have already come to the same conclusion. Ned Balfour was a tough sort of individual for any smart criminal to fool.

On his way Ned thought over his whole intercourse with Ricetti, and concluded he had run down the fellow's little cute play.

The man was an arch-hypocrite, a keen wit, and deep as old "Nick" himself.

Ned reached the *café*, and found Ricetti and Peter both waiting.

The two men had not spoken; whether Ricetti had identified Peter or not, Ned never learned, but he did learn, at once, that Peter had identified the brigand.

The Indian met the detective at the door, and said:

"Do not enter."

"Why not?"

"I have something to tell you."

"Come here."

"Ricetti, the brigand, is inside."

"Is he?"

"Yes."

"All right. I told him to wait for me."

"Then you knew he was there?"

"Yes; you go away; I wish to see Ricetti alone."

Peter walked off, and Ned entered the *café*. It was well on to twelve o'clock.

The detective took a seat near Ricetti. The latter asked:

"Did you see our man?"

"Yes."

"Did you arrange for the duel?"

"No."

"You do not think it best for us to fight?"

"Saranni will never fight you."

"Is he under arrest?"

"Yes."

"You did wrong!"

"I could not help it."

"The man's mouth is sealed forever!" said Ricetti.

"Yes; his lips are sealed forever!" repeated the detective.

There was a significance in Ned's tone that caused Ricetti to ask:

"Is he dead?"

"Yes."

"You killed him?"

"Yes."

"That is bad."

"I could not help it."

"Did he give you any information?"

"No."

"We will never find the missing girl."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"We can hunt her up, I reckon."

"Never!"

"Why are you so positive?"

"Saranni has passed the girl into other hands. You may find her, but when you do, it will be too late!"

"Too late, eh?"

"Too late!"

"I begin to think so myself—indeed, I've an idea of giving up the job."

"I would not do that."

"But you discourage me."

"I wish to prove my fealty."

"That is good for you, but I think I've done all that I can for a girl who, two months ago, I had never seen."

Ricetti was puzzled!

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE Italian knew very well that Ned did not mean one word he was uttering. Ricetti would have been pleased if he could have believed that Ned did speak what he really meant.

"You still mistrust me?" said the brigand.

"I am distrusting no one; I am at sea."

"Believe me, I will do all I can to aid you in recovering the girl."

"I do not believe I shall ever find her."

"What is your idea?"

"I do not believe she is in Paris."

"Who could have taken her from Paris?"

"I can't say."

Ned spoke in a strangely indifferent tone, and the Corsican was more and more puzzled.

"If you had permitted me to carry out my plan with Saranni, I would have secured his secret."

"It can not be helped now. Good-night. Ricetti, if you discover anything come to me, and you shall be a rich man."

"I will come to you. Did I not at once bring you news of Saranni?"

"Yes."

"You shall have whatever points I may gain, but I do not believe we will ever find the girl."

"Good-night."

Ned passed from the saloon, and whispering a word to Peter, passed down the street.

In a moment Ned had worked a change—his dead change, as he called it.

Ricetti sat for some time in the *café*. The brigand was thinking intently.

He sat for two hours, but at length rose from his seat and passed out to the street.

It was two o'clock in the morning—just about the time, ordinarily, when the streets of Paris become deserted.

Ricetti looked up and down the street, and, seeing no one, he stepped forth. As he did so, he muttered:

"I shall be suspicious of my own shadow tonight."

The man called a cab, and bade the cabman drive at a quick gait to a certain number and street. As the brigand got into the cab he muttered to himself:

"Luck favored me this time. The cab came along at the right moment."

The cabman appeared to be a sleepy fellow. He moved his horse along at a slow gait.

Ricetti stuck his head out of the window, and called:

"Hurry up, man! You are moving like a snail!"

"My horse has been on the go all day. If you don't like the pace, get out and walk."

"I will give you double fare to hasten."

"I'd like to accommodate you, monsieur, but my horse is worn out; if I urge him he will drop in the street."

Ricetti settled back in the cab determined to be patient.

The cabman drove slowly along and at length stopped in front of the number Ricetti had given him.

It proved to be a *café* with supper-rooms, which could be hired at any hour of the night.

Ricetti entered the *café*, and only a moment later, a dark figure glided in after him.

Ricetti was met by a waiter, who showed him into a certain room.

The man who had followed in after the brigand stood back in the hall, and waited until the garçon came to him.

"Show me into Number —," said the man. As he spoke he put a twenty-franc piece in the man's hand.

The man opened his eyes.

The stranger said:

"If I come out of that room without any one knowing of my having been there, you shall have one hundred francs!"

The contract was sealed.

A hundred francs would induce a French waiter in Paris to let an assassin in on his own *mother-in-law.*

Ned was put in the room adjoining the one where Ricetti had entered.

We have not attempted to conceal the identity of the man who had followed the brigand into the restaurant.

Ned had made up his mind to track Ricetti. He knew the fellow was deep and cunning, and he had determined to play cunning against him.

When Ned left the *café* he had given Peter certain instructions, and the man had obeyed his instructions well.

The dilatory cabman was none other than the Indian, and he had driven slowly so as to enable Ned to follow him.

The Indian had been driving up and down past the *café*, in anticipation that the brigand would come forth and hire him.

In case the man did not call the cab, Ned was on hand to follow him on foot.

The detective, as our readers will perceive, had blocked every outlet, or rather had spread his net at every point, in order to catch his fish, and he did catch him.

Ned took his position in the room and waited. In a few moments the waiter entered in a stealthy manner, and betrayed the fact that intrigue was an old game in the place.

The waiter showed the American a little secret trap, a port-hole, wherefrom he could look in on the adjoining room.

The detective took an observation, and saw his man indulging in a bottle of good wine.

"Go it, old fellow," muttered the detective. "Just imagine I am drinking with you. It's all the same."

Half an hour passed, and two men joined Ricetti in the supper-room.

"Aha!" exclaimed the American. "I thought so!"

Ned had vindicated his shrewdness and acumen; the two men who had joined the brigand were François and Armand Salabert.

A cold greeting passed between the three men.

"Will you join me in the wine?"

"No; we have come here to settle some business."

"You have come prepared?"

The men misunderstood his remark, and answered:

"Yes: we have come prepared!" and both the Salaberts exhibited weapons.

"Oh, that is the way you have come prepared?"

"Yes."

"I did not mean *that* sort of preparation. I am doubly prepared that way myself. I did not come here to be brow-beaten; you can not scare me; you may as well understand that before we proceed further!"

"What have you to propose?"

"I propose to *surrender the girl to you!*"

"We are ready to receive her!"

"So am I," muttered Ned.

The detective was in just high glee. He felt certain that at last he had fallen upon the right trail.

"You have the money?"

"Yes."

"Hand it over!"

"That is not according to our contract; you are to first surrender the girl."

"And then?"

"We will pay you."

"Do you expect me to trust you?"

"Do you expect us to trust you?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

"You are a very cunning man, Ricetti; very cunning," said François, in a sneering tone, "but you can not mislead us again—you succeeded once."

"It was diamond cut diamond. You tried to fool me. I fooled you, and I will not trust you."

"How much money do you demand?"

"Fifty thousand francs."

"And you expect us to pay you fifty thousand francs?"

"I do."

"And take your word for the fulfillment of your part of the bargain."

"Yes."

"We will not do it!"

"Then our negotiations are at an end. I will seek another market for my wares."

Armand Salabert, as usual, began to work himself into a passion.

"We will take the girl!" he said.

"Oh, you will?"

"Yes."

"You will find her first."

"We can find her."

"How?"

"We have a way, and we can find her after you are dead."

Armand made a motion toward his pistol.

Ricetti laughed.

"You would scare me, eh?"

François spoke to Armand.

Ricetti showed one of those little trumpets so common in France.

The French people use little trumpets instead of whistles for alarm purposes.

"One breath and I have enough good men here to eat you up, so do not attempt to frighten me, if you please!"

The brigand spoke in a defiant and vaunting tone.

François interposed, and said:

"You shall have your money."

"Then it is all right. When shall I have it? Now?"

"No."

"When?"

"As soon as the girl is in our possession."

"Oh, no; you do not want the girl, I see."

"Why, fellow, you can not expect us to trust you!"

"Nor can you expect me to trust you; so, as far as I can see, it's a draw."

"It's a draw until I play in my trump," muttered Ned, who could plainly overhear every word that was said.

"You need not surrender the girl. You can prove to us that she is in your possession."

"My word is sufficient."

"Not for us!" blurted Armand.

"Do you men know what has occurred? Have you heard of the death of a man to-night at one of the hotels?"

"Rideau killed a man."

"Rideau killed him, eh? Is that the report around Paris?"

"Yes."

"Well, Rideau did not kill the man."

"Who did?"

"The American."

"Why did the American kill him?"

"He thought the man had the girl in his possession, so you see it's a dangerous game we are playing."

"I wish I could meet that American once," said Armand. "The fellow manages to keep out of my way."

"You shall meet him 'in the sweet by and by,'" sung Ned, from his little fortress wall.

"You would never want to meet him a second time," said Ricetti.

"Did you ever meet him?"

"Yes; I have met with him, and I have proved myself the smarter man of the two. I am the only man in France who has been able to foil the American."

"Well, you *did* foil me for awhile," muttered Ned, "but not for long. I have got your *full measure now*, Monsieur Ricetti."

"Come, Ricetti," said François, "we certainly can make some sort of an arrangement."

"You have heard my terms."

"Suppose we pay you a portion of the money?"

"All or none! I can not hold the girl longer than to-night."

"Where is she?"

"If I should tell you, my friend, you would have no call to pay me the money. The girl is where neither you nor any one else can find her."

"We will pay you half the money."

"That will not do."

François and Armand held a whispered conversation, when François said:

"I fear we can not deal."

"As you wish. If you do not deal to-night you will never have another chance."

"But we have not brought the money with us."

"You promised to bring it, and that was the purpose of our meeting. You would go after it?"

"Yes."

"That means treachery. You can not fool me!"

"We will go and get the money."

"You can go. I do not wish to keep you here; but we do not meet again for an amicable deal."

François and Armand had decided upon a scheme. The fact was, the scoundrels did not have the money. They had intended to fool Ricetti.

They rose to go.

"Remember," said Ricetti, "if you go without closing our bargain there will be no deals in future."

"We did not bring the money with us."

"So much the worse for you."

The two cousins had reached the door.

"Will you pay me half in advance?"

"No."

"Will you pay me one quarter?"

The two men saw that they had their man at a disadvantage, and François answered promptly:

"Not one cent until the girl is before our eyes!"

"Can I really trust you?"

"You can."

"Remember, I will be prepared for treachery."

"You can."

"I will surrender the girl."

"Enough; do so, and you shall have your money."

"You go for the cash?"

"Yes."

"Meet me one hour from now, and show me the money in your possession, and I will lead you to where you can find the girl."

"Enough; it's a bargain? Where shall we meet you?"

"Under the shadow of the Arch of Triumph."

"You will be there?"

"I will."

"One hour from now?"

"Yes; one hour from now."

"You will not have a new proposition?"

"I will not, but I must see that you have the money."

"You shall be satisfied on that point."

"Then adieu; in one hour I will meet you."

The two cousins left the room.

"I reckon it's my turn now for a dicker," muttered Ned.

The detective waited for the Corsicans to depart.

Ricetti remained behind; the man was talking aloud to himself; his soliloquy was involuntary. He was not really aware that he was talking.

"Those fellows mean treachery," he said; "they have no mind to pay me a cent; they are up to some game."

A moment he remained silent, and then repeated:

"Yes, yes, they mean treachery."

At that moment the door opened. Ned entered the room, and Ricetti heard the refrain to his declaration:

"Yes, yes, they mean treachery."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

RICETTI was taken aback, if ever rogue were.

"Well, *you* are a nice duck!" said Ned, in a calm, easy tone.

"You here!" ejaculated Ricetti.

"Yes, I am here."

"I am glad you have come."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I am on the track of the girl. It is as I suspected."

"What did you suspect?"

"I suspected that Saranni had transferred the girl to the Salaberts."

"You did, eh?"

"Yes; you see I am determined to find her for you."

"Well, I am glad you are so devoted to my interests. You are going for that fortune I promised you."

"Yes; I am anxious for the opportunity to become an honest man."

"A laudable desire."

The detective spoke in a tone that caused Ricetti to look at him sharply.

"How long have you been here?" demanded the brigand.

"I came in just after you did!" was the cool and frank reply.

"Where were you?"

"In the next room."

"You heard all that passed between the Salaberts and myself?"

"Every word."

Ricetti was a cool cuss, and he answered:

"You are too much for me."

"Yes; a little too heavy, you villain! I fear you have postponed your idea of becoming an honest man!"

"No, monsieur."

"You have not?"

"No."

"Well, what is your idea now, I should like to hear?"

"I am going to do one honest act."

"Are you?"

"I am."

"And then?"

"Will you believe me if I tell you the truth?"

"Well, I ought to believe you—a man who has been so truthful as Ricetti has earned the right to be believed."

"I propose to tell you a strange story."

"Indeed, you have told me several."

"I meant to surrender the girl to you."

"Did you, indeed?"

"I did."

"What would have been your intention if the Salaberts had given you the fifty thousand francs?"

"It was my intention to surrender the girl to you."

"Ah!"

"Yes; I intended to get their money and fool them. I would not dared to have run against you; I only wished to make all I could."

"You are certainly a clever scoundrel."

"You ought to believe me."

"Yes, I ought to believe you."

"Not because you trust my word."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Simply because you ought to know that I would not dare to go against you!"

"I believe the Salaberts declared they would not trust you?"

"I did not expect they would."

"But you expect I will?"

"Yes."

"I will."

"How long?"

"About as long as it will take you to tell me where the girl is to be found."

"You shall have the girl."

"Thank you, I mean to have her."

"But I shall ask one favor of you."

"What favor would you ask?"

"Let me get the money from the Salaberts?"

"Not much."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Serve you as I did Saranni," came the startling answer.

Ricetti turned pale. He knew the man he had to deal with. The American was not the man to utter idle threats.

"If you kill me my lips will be sealed."

"But the girl will be safe."

"There is an easier way."

"Is there?"

"Yes."

The detective, during all the conversation, had spoken in a very peculiar tone.

The brigand felt very uneasy.

"I would like to get that money out of the Salaberts."

"I do not doubt the honesty of your desire."

"I can get the money, and you can have the girl."

"How would you arrange it?

"Let me get the money—you take the girl."

"You have a fine cheek! You should hire yourself out to some scissors-grinder. He would not heed a whet-stone—your cheek would answer."

"You do not understand me."

"I think I do."

"You do not."

"Will you explain?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

"I will surrender the girl first."

"Ah, now you talk!"

"That is what I meant from the first."

"I reckon we may deal; and if the girl is surrendered, what have I to do with your game with the Salaberts?"

"Will you let me go?"

"If you surrender the girl I will."

"The girl shall be surrendered."

"When?"

"At once."

"Where is she?"

"Not far from here."

A smile played over Ned's face as he said:

"Suppose you go and bring her here."

"Bah! You are joking!"

"Who took the girl from the den?"

"I did."

"When?"

"After I had left you there."

"You scoundrel, you did foil me once!"

"I did, and I am proud of it; but you have run me down in the end."

"You shall not foil me again."

"I shall not try to."

"You had better not."

"I know that I am at the end of my string with you!"

"Take me to the girl."

"Will you take all the chances?"

"What chances are there to take?"

"The Salaberts may be lying in wait for me."

"For what purpose?"

"They will track me to the place where the girl is concealed."

"Let them."

"I will go; you follow me!"

"That would be trusting you."

"No; you need not lose sight of me."

"And where will you go?"

"Direct to the house where the captive girl is confined."

Ned thought a moment; there was a reason why he did not wish to be tracked himself by the Salaberts, and he said:

"I will try you."

"All right, we will go."

"Let me tell you one thing. I carry your life here; if you attempt any of your didos, you are a dead man!"

The detective tapped the butt of his pistol.

"I will not attempt any didos. I would rather you would get the better of me than the Salaberts, and it is their game to do so."

"Very well, we understand each other; start, I will keep you in sight."

The two men left the place.

Ricetti started a minute in advance of the American.

Ned followed close after his man, and had not been out but a few moments when he discovered that Ricetti had formed a right conclusion.

A man darted from the shadow of a passageway and stole after the brigand.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE American was the third man in the race

The time came when he regretted a piece of stupidity which he had permitted on his own part.

The detective was so sure of his man he had not for a moment anticipated the tragic contingency that left him in the dark, after all, as to the whereabouts of the beautiful Mystery of Paris.

The detective, as third man in the chase, kept pretty close to the second man. He saw the latter quicken his pace and steal forward more rapidly.

"What can he be up to?" muttered Ned.

The words had just left his lips, when he discovered the dodger's intention, and discovered it when it was too late to interfere.

Number two in the chase was Armand Salabert. Ned had identified his man at the first glance.

A Corsican played a Corsican's game on one of his own countrymen.

Armand Salabert stole close behind Ricetti. Ned leaped forward, but was too late.

An arm cut the air, there were two or three blows struck, and Ricetti the brigand fell to the ground.

The moment he had done the deed Armand darted away.

It was too late for Ned to do anything. He felt like smashing his own head for not having been quicker and more on the alert.

As stated, it was a contingency he had not anticipated. He had calculated that Armand would follow the brigand, only to make the discovery as to where he went.

The hot-headed Corsican, however, could not restrain his vindictive propensities, and the deed was done.

Ned did not go near the body, but "lit" out. It would have been a dangerous thing for him to have been found in the vicinity.

The body would be found, and it would prove another Paris mystery, and they are of almost daily occurrence.

Ned followed in the same direction he had seen Armand disappear.

The detective was in good disguise—a rig that was known to Rideau alone.

Armand didn't run far from the scene of his crime. He entered an all-night *café*. The deed had been committed in one of the streets where murder is of frequent occurrence.

Ned saw the man go into the *café*, and in a few moments the American sauntered in, and took a seat near the murderer.

While sitting at the table Ned determined to play a sort of apparition game.

He well understood the superstitious character of the Corsican, and he desired to drive the man out of Paris.

Our hero had a glass of wine before him, and commenced to look into his glass in a peculiar manner. His manner was indeed so peculiar, as it was intended to be, that it attracted the attention of the man sitting next to him—a German.

"Eh?" demanded the latter, "what do you see?"

"Do you see anything in that glass?" asked Ned.

"Yes."

"What?"

"Wine."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

Ned beckoned to Armand, the Corsican, to come to him.

"My friend, do you see anything in that glass?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Wine."

"You see nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"It's strange!" said Ned.

"What do *you* see?" demanded Armand.

The German had gone out. Ned and the Corsican were the only people in the place, save the lady who attended to the cash-counter, who was asleep, as also the waiter who had served the wine. The latter lay in an adjoining room

In answer to Armand's question, Ned said:

"I see a guillotine."

The Corsican turned pale.

"Bah!" he said; "you see a guillotine in a glass of wine?"

"Yes, yes; and now I see the face of a dead man!"

"You are crazy!"

"May be, yes; I fear I am going crazy. I never saw such a sight before in a glass of wine."

"You had better go home."

"I am afraid to trust myself to go home after that; will you go with me?"

"No."

Ned said no more, and the Corsican took his seat at another table.

Ned sat and kept his eyes fixed on the Corsican.

The latter at length observed the stare, and said:

"Why do you look at me?"

"I dare not tell you."

"You must not look at me in that manner—it is insulting."

"I can not help it, monsieur."

"You can not help it?"

"No."

"You must."

"I can not."

"Why not?"

"I dare not tell."

"Again, you had better go home."

"I dare not go home. I will wait until daylight."

Armand began to grow uneasy. He did not wish to get into a row so soon. He left the saloon.

Ned followed him. Armand walked a short distance, and seeing the man following him came to a halt.

"Why do you follow me?"

"I can not help it."

"My friend, I can not permit you to follow me. I will call a policeman."

"Do so."

"And what will you do?"

"Point you out as a murderer."

Armand uttered a low cry. He came close to Ned and said:

"You must explain what you mean, you fool!"

"Do you insist?"

"I do."

"You saw nothing in the glass of wine?"

"Nothing."

"I did."

"What did you see?"

"A guillotine."

"Bah! you are crazy!"

"I saw the face of a dead man, and it was your face."

Armand came close, very close to the American.

"You are crazy!" he said.

"No; I am not crazy!"

Armand made a movement, when the American said:

"Be careful!"

Armand turned on his heel and ran away like a deer.

"Well," said Ned, "this is a nice piece of business all through. Ricetti is dead. He died with the secret unspoken, and I am left to find a clew to the whereabouts of the beautiful Mystery of Paris."

Ned returned to the point were he had left Peter.

The Indian was waiting like a faithful sentinel.

"What have you accomplished?" he asked, and Ned answered:

"I am all at sea!"

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE detective's adventures were over for that night. He had passed an eventful twelve hours, but had practically accomplished nothing.

Ned returned to his lodgings for another day's sleep. He was a night owl. He prowled around at night, but when the sun rose he sought rest.

Late in the afternoon, after a good day's sleep, Ned appeared at a well-known resort for Americans. He was desirous of hearing the news in a quiet way.

Ned did hear plenty of news of its kind; there were all manner of rumors afloat.

The American sat down to write some letters. He was a magnificent-looking man, even when in repose; every line of his face denoted the champion, the hero, who was ever ready to perform deeds of valor.

In the room were several American ladies talking over their haps and mishaps.

Ned was very much amused, although the gossip interfered with the tenor of his letters.

The giant, however, succeeded in finishing his missives after a season, and walked forth.

The first man he met was Rideau.

"Well," said the French officer, "I see you have downed another of the rascals, and I fear the time may come when you will get into a serious scrape."

"You mean the killing of Ricetti?"

"Yes."

"The man has been identified, then?"

"I identified the body at the morgue, but I kept my discovery to myself."

"I had nothing to do with the killing of that man."

"Then it was a murder!"

"He must have been dropped by some of his companions with whom he quarreled."

"Have you found the missing girl yet?"

"No."

"Are you on her track?"

"No."

"Can I be of any service to you?"

"The time may come when you can be of service to me."

"Do not fear to call upon me for aid."

"Thank you."

Late in the afternoon Ned took a stroll in the Luxembourg Gardens.

As the good fellow afterward remarked, he was always strolling somewhere to get into a scrape or scrimmage of some sort.

He had not been in the garden long before he learned that once again he had arrived just in time.

The detective was strolling in one of the remote paths, when he came upon two of the ladies whom he had met in the exchange office.

They were two bright-faced young ladies, innocent and beautiful.

Ned watched them. It was rather home-like and cheering to his rugged nature to hear their lively prattle in his native language.

It was indeed a bright and beautiful picture, but soon the shadow came.

A stalwart Frenchman, elegantly dressed, had espied the two girls, and had fixed his wicked eyes upon them.

At the same moment the girls discovered that they had become the object of the man's glances.

They made up their minds to pay no attention to him and to hasten to the more frequented paths at once.

Ned took in the situation and gloried in the opportunity to serve an impudent Frenchman as he deserved.

The giant made bold to go forward and speak to his countrywomen.

"That man is annoying you?" said Ned.

The girls were rejoiced to be addressed by one of their own countrymen. They well knew the respect which is accorded to ladies in the United States; and we will here take the opportunity to state that in no place in the world are ladies accorded more courtesy than in America. We speak from actual observation.

"Would you young ladies like to see that fellow get his deserts?"

The girls were genuine high-spirited American young misses, and both expressed a desire to see one impudent man served as he merited.

"Walk down toward the fountain, stop and look at the fish, and I will *amuse* you!" said Ned.

"Oh, you will get yourself into trouble."

"Never mind about my getting into trouble; just do as I say and don't appear to know me at all; it will be all right."

The girls did not fully understand what was about to happen; they thought that possibly

their big countryman would give the Frenchman a "good talking to;" they did not know at the time that Ned was not much of a talker, but a man of action.

The conversation above detailed occurred during a few brief seconds. The girls did as they were told, walked over toward one of the fountains which was surrounded with a basin of water to the depth of three or four feet.

The American was getting rather rusty. He felt just like having one of his old-fashioned "turns."

The girls walked merrily along, wondering what the Frenchman would say when he received his "talking to."

The Frenchman followed them: they were really two beautiful girls, and had he merely followed in mere respectful admiration, it would have been all right.

The man, however, as it proved, had another purpose.

The girls carried out their part of the programme pretty well; they soon reached the fountain, and, leaning over the rail, studied the movements of the gold-fish.

The Frenchman's opportunity had come, and so had Ned's.

There were a great many people strolling around, and there were a number of policemen lolling amid the throng.

The Frenchman approached the girls, and, leaning down, stared in the rudest manner right in their faces.

If any of our young lady readers have been to Paris they can fully appreciate the impertinence of the incident depicted.

The girls would have turned away, but the man addressed them.

Ned approached a policeman, and said:

"Do you see that man is speaking to those young ladies?"

"He won't hurt them!" came the indifferent reply.

Impertinence is not punishable in France; it appears to be permissible.

A man may call you any name he chooses, and if you resist it with a blow, you are locked up for half a year, and your insulter is condoled with.

Seeing the officer would not interfere, Ned concluded to do the interfering himself.

The fact was, Old Ironsides had known what his answer would be when he addressed the policeman.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE American walked over to where the girls stood.

The Frenchman had addressed a very low and vulgar remark to them. As the young ladies spoke French, they understood the allusion, and both were blushing like two mad rabes, when the detective drew near.

The Frenchman had just addressed a second remark to the young ladies, when Ned stepped forward and demanded:

"Are you acquainted with those ladies, monsieur?"

The Frenchman was wrathy in a moment.

"What is it your business?" he asked.

"They are American ladies, and I am an American."

"They may be ladies, but you are a fool!" came the indignant retort.

Ned stepped nearer the man.

"Do not approach me!" came the command.

"Why, you miserable sneak, I am going to teach you a lesson. I am going to let you know, in an emphatic manner, that it is not safe to insult American ladies!"

The Frenchman retorted in an insulting manner The fellow relied upon the French law. He did not know that he had a man to deal with who didn't care a snap for French law.

"When I get through with you, I reckon you will remember your lesson!"

"I would call your attention to the fact, Monsieur Yankee, that there are several policemen near by, and if you do not march off about your business I shall put you in charge."

"My business is just here at this moment!" said Ned.

His turn was fast coming on, and he welcomed the tingling sensation that indicated its coming.

The girls stood by wondering what was about to happen: they were not kept long in waiting.

Ned said, in a low tone, in English:

"After you have seen the fun a moment, young ladies, you just quietly sneak off, or you may be held as witnesses."

"I hope you will not get yourself in trouble on our account, sir."

"You never mind me; just look out for yourselves after the fun commences."

The Frenchman stood by while the above conversation ensued in a language that he did not understand.

Having warned the two girls, Ned cleared for action.

We use a sea phrase, because the American was about to engage in a watery transaction.

"Your time has come, Frenchy!" he said, and in English Old Ironsides counted his usual American one—two—three; the next moment he seized the Frenchman, and the catastrophe was precipitated.

Old Ironsides sent the Frenchman, with all his fine clothes, flying into the water.

There was just a little bit of commotion; the act had been witnessed by several hundred people.

"Now go," said he, to the girls, as the crowd began to gather.

"Oh, sir, you have got yourself into trouble!"

"Not much, but you two just 'light' out, or there will be trouble!"

The policeman had witnessed the affair, and came rushing toward the offender; there was a mixed crowd.

The detective ran into a little building in the park—a building peculiar to Paris, and for general use. In just about three American seconds a man issued from the building; but he bore no resemblance to the fellow who had tossed the Frenchman into the water.

The detective was seen to enter the building, and a crowd surrounded it, and several policemen entered.

In the meantime Ned mingled in the crowd, and had the impudence to inquire of a by-stander what all the row was about.

The offender was not found in the building, and for the best of reasons—he had "skipped."

How the man had got out, in the presence of the large crowd, was a mystery.

Ned thought that inquiries might be made of him, and he quietly walked away.

He walked directly back to the basin, to the place where the wet Frenchman was standing in the midst of a great throng of excited people.

The Frenchman told his story. Ned stood near by and heard the tale repeated, and then, with a quiet laugh, moved away.

He felt about as proud of the afternoon's work as of any trick he had performed in Paris.

In walking through the streets the detective had seen considerable of just the business he had punished.

The matter which more heavily weighed upon his mind, however, was the whereabouts of Emily Salabert. Ned was at his wits' end for a clew. He sat down upon a bench upon one of the public boulevards and thought intensely. He was seeking to fix in his own mind some plan of action.

The death of Ricetti was a terrible blow to him. The man had been killed just at the moment when he was about to reveal his secret.

Had Ned dreamed of such an accident as the fellow's death, he would have acted differently.

One fact was assured: Ricetti was really leading our hero to the place of concealment when he met his death.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" suddenly exclaimed the detective, "why didn't I think of it before? The fact is, I am getting sort of confused in this funny French capital."

Ned, in thinking over the facts, came to the conclusion that he must have been near the place where the girl was hidden when the man was killed, and to himself he remarked:

"That is my cruising ground!" At the same moment another idea came to him, and he turned his steps toward the famous Paris morgue.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

NED knew that the body of the dead brigand had been carried to the morgue, and he thought he might strike a clew.

The idea of French politeness, as we have had occasion to write before, is a fraud; it all lies in the brim of their hats.

The official at the morgue received the American in a very brusque manner, and would have forestalled his purpose, had not the American presented a bit of paper upon which was written a peremptory order, to which was signed the name of Rideau.

The official's manner changed at once. The great detective's name was of greater importance than would have been an edict from the office of the minister of justice.

Ned was permitted to examine everything that had been taken from the body of the dead Corsican.

There was nothing that he found that served as a guide to him, and he left the official death-chamber to go forth to hunt up a clew.

The detective went over to the neighborhood where the murder had taken place. He stood upon the very spot; and, while he stood there, a man came and stood near him.

The man was Armand Salabert.

A sort of fascination seemed to draw the assassin to the scene of his crime.

"This is the place," he said, addressing Ned, "where the man was killed this morning."

"This is the place where the man was killed before sunrise. Yes."

"You appear to have the time down."

"Yes; I can tell you the exact time when it was done."

"You are so exact, you must have seen the murder committed?"

"I did."

"You saw the murder committed?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you go and tell the police?"

"I will in good time."

"Do you know the man who committed the murder?"

"Yes," came the answer, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"You saw the murder committed, and recognized the assassin?"

"Yes."

Armand spoke in an eager tone, and there was a slight tremulousness in his voice.

"Yes, I saw the murder committed, and I recognized the murderer!" repeated Ned.

"You should inform the police."

"I will when I get ready."

"Why have you not done so?"

"I thought I would wait."

"You are a fool!"

"Am I?"

"Yes; you think there will be a reward offered."

"No; I am not looking for a reward."

"Why do you wait?"

"Because I choose to do so."

"I've a good mind to call a policeman and tell him that you are a man who can name the murderer."

"Do so."

"What will you do if I call the police?"

"I will tell them to *arrest you!*" came the straightforward reply.

"Tell them to arrest me?"

"Yes."

"Why tell them to arrest me?"

"Because you know as much about the murder as I do."

"You are a lunatic."

"Oh, no."

"You are."

"I can convince you that I am not."

"You will so convince me if you will name the assassin."

"I can."

"Do so."

"His name is Armand Salabert!"

The Corsican recoiled, asking:

"Who are you?"

"I am the man you have been looking for so long."

"The American?"

"I am the American!"

Armand Salabert was dumfounded. He was absolutely paralyzed.

"Do you know me?"

"Yes; I know you."

"You charge me with the murder?"

"I do; and you get out of this neighborhood, or I will arrest you!"

"You arrest me!"

"Yes."

"I defy you; you are an outlaw yourself!"

"Hold on, old man; do not attempt to serve me as you did Ricetti, or you go down; and besides, there comes a policeman; if you remain until he reaches this spot, I will hand you over to his charge!"

Armand Salabert turned pale and shrunk away. He had met the American face to face, and from the terrible man he had recoiled like a cowed animal.

There were reasons why Ned dared not hand the man over to the police; our hero would have been the chief witness, and on the trial strange stories and combinations would have been developed.

On the other hand, Ned did not want the fellow in the neighborhood.

Armand slunk away, as stated, and the policeman came along and eyed Ned in a searching manner, but did not speak to him.

The detective slowly walked away from the spot, and soon after entered a *café*.

The *café*, as it turned out, was a resort for Italians; indeed, the keeper of the place was himself an Italian.

Ned was quick to observe the fact, and at once muttered:

"Well, may I be walloped if I don't think I've just struck the right spot!"

Ned had hardly uttered the words when François Salabert entered the place.

Again Ned muttered!

"I'm just walking over the Salabert family to-night, but it's only another proof that I am on the right 'lay.'"

François Salabert spoke to an Italian, and the two men went into a private little room just off the main saloon.

Ned drew his chair to the door, and tried to listen to what passed. He could overhear a rambling of voices as the men engaged in a whispered conversation, but he could not make anything out of what he heard, as the men were speaking in the Italian language.

François came out, after a few moments, and left the saloon.

Ned followed after him.

The Corsican went to a certain locality near by and passed along one of those alleyways so numerous in certain parts of Paris, in what may be called the slums of the city.

François went to a certain house—a little one-story stone house—one of a tumble-down row of similar buildings.

The house was in appearance almost a facsimile of the building that covered the entrance to the subterranean chamber which our hero had unearthed.

François rapped for admittance, and the door was opened by a large, dirty, rough-looking woman.

Ned was at fault. He wished to overhear what was said, but could not enter the house without his presence being known, as the door opened from the street right into the room where the family lived.

There was no hallway into which Ned could crawl to listen.

He took up a position outside, determined to wait.

If the girl were there François would certainly bring her out. If she were not there Ned could discover the object of his visit after he had gone.

François did not remain long in the house. In less than ten minutes he came forth.

Ned cared nothing about Salabert. He could find him any time. He was more anxious to learn the object of his visit to the woman, and in a few moments he knocked at the same door.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

"WELL, what do you want?" came the question, in a rough tone, from the woman.

"I want to see you."

"I'm here; look at me."

"If you were polite, you would ask me to enter your house."

"Why do you wish to enter my house?"

"I will tell you when I am inside your door."

"You can not come in."

"Why not?"

"I am not receiving visitors to-night."

"You will receive me."

"No; I will not admit you."

Ned handed the woman a ten-franc piece.

"Come in," was the immediate response to the presentation of the metallic ticket, which is a most wonderful and effective open sesame all over Europe.

It was a rude and very dirty apartment into which the detective was ushered, and when he had seated himself, the woman, who had also taken a seat, said

"Now you will tell me what you wish?"

"You had another visitor."

"When?"

"A few moments ago."

"You are mistaken. I had a visitor yesterday."

"You had a visitor a few moments ago."

"No."

"I saw him enter here, and leave later on."

"You were watching?"

"Yes, I was watching."

"What has my husband done that he should be watched; will you tell me?"

"Was that your husband who was here?"

"Yes."

"Does he always knock when he wishes to enter his own house?"

The woman fixed a keen glance on the detective, and said:

"Ah, you are no fool!"

"I am no fool!"

"Do you know the man who was here?"

"I do."

"What is his name?"

"You don't know your own husband's name?"

The woman laughed in a coarse manner. She was a Frenchwoman, and evidently a very deep and cunning person.

"You have told me he was not my husband."

"No; I did not say he was not your husband. I only asked if your husband always knocked when he sought entrance to his own house."

"Well, he is not my husband."

"Who is the man?"

"You said you knew him."

"I do."

"Then why ask me?"

"I wish to find out whether you know who he is or not."

"I only know what he told me."

"What did he tell you?"

"He told me his name was Bandrais."

"Did you believe him?"

"No."

"What was his purpose in coming here?"

"What is your purpose?"

"To find out what the other man wanted."

"You speak French pretty well."

"Thank you."

"But you are not a Frenchman."

"It makes no difference."

"You are an American."

Ned discovered that he had a very deep and cunning woman to deal with.

"I am an American, eh?"

"You are."

"How do you know?"

"I lived in America once—I was born there. That is the reason I am so handsome. You know the American women are the handsomest in the world, they say, and I am a specimen."

Ned was amused; and, if it were not that he had very serious business on hand, he would have had considerable fun with the brazen woman.

"You are indeed a handsome woman," he said, "but that has nothing to do with the purpose of your visitor."

"Which visitor?"

"Both visitors."

"If I had remained in America, I would have preserved my complexion. I was thirteen years old when my parents returned to France. I have lived in Paris fifty years, so you see I am sixty-three years of age."

"I am not a good enough talker for you, madame."

"You are a good keen fellow, and you will go the right way to work pretty soon."

Ned took the hint and gave the woman twenty francs.

The creature laughed.

"That will only admit to the gallery," she said.

"You can trust my liberality."

"Ah! now you are getting at it; the man came here to ask me some questions."

"Do you really know his name?"

"He told me his name was Bandrais."

"Did you believe him?"

"No."

"Do you know who he is?"

"No; it is not a matter of importance to me who he is. His name should be Peter Promise."

"Why?"

"He tried to pump me, and promised lots of pay, but I did not see the color of a sou."

"I am not a Peter Promise."

"So much the better if you wish to learn anything from me."

"What did Peter Promise seek to learn?"

"He inquired about a certain female."

"What female?"

"A mademoiselle."

"Why not come right down to business?"

"I could."

"I know it."

"Pay, pay as you go, is my motto."

"Here is a little assister."

Ned gave the woman another gold piece.

"That is it; you would have been a cavalier in the time of the kings."

"Now, then, about the mademoiselle."

"She was a friend of an Italian named Altinni."

"Who was Altinni?" asked Ned, in a careless tone, but his carelessness was assumed, inwardly he was very eager.

"Altinni was a man who boarded with me once."

"And who was the mademoiselle?"

"A relative of Altinni."

"What do you know about Altinni?"

"He was a Corsican."

"Oh!"

"He is dead."

"Ah, he is dead!"

"Yes."

"I beg your pardon; Altinni was not killed, it was Ricetti."

The woman fixed a keen glance upon the detective.

"I like you."

"Why?"

"You are so smart."

"I think you are pretty smart yourself."

"I shall not give you any of your money back for your compliment."

"Your boarder was Ricetti!"

"So you say."

"Here."

Ned handed the woman another gold piece.

"You are the man to get at the facts; yes, Altinni was Ricetti."

"And the woman?"

"She may have been his wife."

"Was she a Frenchwoman?"

"No, an Italian lady—a bad woman, Ricetti feared."

"Do you know why the man Bandrais inquired about the woman?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He wanted to learn where she lived."

"Did you tell him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I did not know."

"Do you know?"

"I do not."

"Can I accept your declaration?"

"Yes."

"When did you see the woman last?"

"Day before yesterday."

"She was here?"

"Yes."

"Did she see Altinni?"

"She did."

"Well?"

"You want me to tell you what occurred?"

"Yes."

"They had a row."

"About what?"

"I reckon the woman was jealous."

"How much of what you have told me did you reveal to Bandrais?"

"I told him nothing."

"Why not?"

"He was a Peter Promise. I am too old to take promises—I must see the gold."

"And you told him nothing? How did you get rid of him?"

"I told him I did not know the parties he was inquiring about."

"Can I believe you?"

"You can."

"What did he say when he went away?"

"Nothing."

"He was satisfied?"

"No; he will watch me, but let him watch."

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

"WHY will he watch you?" asked Ned.

"Because he thinks I lied to him."

"How did he happen to come here?"

"Some Italian who was a friend of Altinni sent him here."

"I am going to prove your words."

"Very well."

"Now tell me, can you find the woman who quarreled with Ricetti?"

"I might find her."

"Will you?"

"How much shall I receive?"

"A thousand francs."

"A good deal of money."

"It shall be yours the moment you lead me to the house where the woman lives."

"Will you come here to-morrow?"

"I will."

"Come, and you shall know all that I am able to learn of the whereabouts of the woman."

"Do you know her name?"

"I do not; but I will find her."

"You must be careful."

"Of whom?"

"The man Bandrais."

"Why?"

"He will follow you."

"Let him if he can; you do not know me, neither does he. I can take care of myself, and I will; come to-morrow, and you will learn all I can discover."

"That man will follow you and learn all that I have to pay for, and he will avail himself of his knowledge."

"That man can not follow me."

"You do not know him."

"It matters not."

"We can arrange it."

"How?"

Ned whispered a few words to the woman.

The latter was a very large, raw-boned creature, a woman who could have dressed up in man's clothes, and have passed for a genuine brother of Adam.

When Ned had concluded his whispering, the woman said:

"I said you were a very smart man."

"What do you think of my idea?"

"We can make sure."

"We can."

Half an hour later the woman issued from her house. It was a singular fact, that the woman came forth; the man who had entered that house had not been seen to come out.

The woman passed on her way, but she had not gone far when a man started to follow her.

The man muttered, as he started to dog the woman:

"*I thought so!*"

The woman muttered, as she saw the man start to follow her:

"I thought so!"

It was rather funny that they both should have hit upon the same line of thought.

François Salabert had interviewed the woman. She had denied knowing anything about the party he was inquiring about, and he had said:

"Can you learn about her for me?"

She had answered:

"I might."

He had said:

"Do so, and I will pay you well."

The man had not believed the woman's story; and the woman, as it appeared, had placed no reliance upon his promise to pay her.

Salabert never did mean to pay. He was playing a little cunning. He meant to lure the woman to look for the party he was seeking to find. He meant to follow her; and, when he saw her issue forth, he congratulated himself upon his own cunning, and said as recorded:

"I thought so!"

The woman walked along the street—walked a great distance from her humble abode—walked over to the Champs Elysées, and, when almost opposite the Arch of Triumph, came to a halt, sat down on a bench, and appeared to be enjoying the night.

She had not spoken to a living soul—had not stopped at a single house, but had taken a direct route to the place where she had come to a halt.

When François Salabert saw the woman sit down, he muttered to himself:

"Well, what does she mean?"

The Corsican walked away a moment to consider upon his course of action. He did not go far, and only turned his back for a moment. Upon facing around again he saw that the bench was occupied, not by a woman, but a man.

It was open space all around. If the woman had walked away she could not have gained over ten yards during the moments that the Corsican's back was turned.

"What does it mean?" ejaculated the man.

He looked in every direction to discover the retreating form of the woman, but not a solitary figure was in sight, save the man who lolled upon the bench.

François stood perfectly amazed.

"Where has the woman gone?" he muttered. "Where did the man come from?"

The Corsican studied a moment, and then approached the place where the man sat.

The benches are public property, any one can occupy them. François took a seat beside the man.

"Did you see a woman here?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

"Vanished into the air," came the response.

The Corsican leaped to his feet and ejaculated:

"Fooled!"

"Yes, François, you have been fooled again."

"Everywhere I meet you!"

"Yes; and you will meet me everywhere like your own shadow unless you leave Paris."

"You are an outlaw; you had better leave Paris."

"Oh, no; I am not ready."

"Nor am I, but I can summon the police."

"You dare not; you tried it once before."

"I have something to tell you."

"Well, tell me your budget."

"You have been tracked."

"Oh, that is boy's talk; and now I have something to tell you; advise your Cousin Armand to leave Paris, or I will inform the police as to the identity of the murderer of Ricetti."

"The police know who murdered Ricetti."

"Do they?"

"They do."

"Has your cousin confessed?"

"My cousin saw the murder committed."

"Ah, yes, he did!"

"He has several witnesses who will swear they saw the murder committed, and they will identify the murderer."

"They would perjure themselves."

"It matters not, *you* can study on the risks *you* run in remaining in Paris."

"I run no risk."

"You will learn by to-morrow."

"I reckon you will also learn something by to-morrow. Rideau knows who killed Ricetti."

"We will meet again."

"Yes, some day for the last time, François Salabert. I tell you now, be warned in time, and get out of Paris; the game is coming to a close."

François Salabert raised his hand in a warning manner, and repeated:

"Yes, the game is coming to a close; you think yourself smart, but a mine has been laid for you and it will explode when you least expect it!"

"You started out to track the old woman to-night," said Ned, changing the subject, and speaking in a jeering tone.

"That was only a side game."

"Ha! ha! you didn't recognize me when I opened the door for you, did you? But I didn't give you much information, did I?"

François did not know what to believe; the detective had assumed so many disguises, had overmatched him in so many different ways, he was almost inclined to believe that what Ned intimated was the truth.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

A FEW moments later the two men separated.

Ned was full of laughter; the Corsican was full of curses.

The American had proved himself indeed L'American Terrible. He was mystery itself; and, as to his powers, he appeared to bear a charmed life. He had contended single-handed against a whole drove of ruffians and schemers, and, as far as the game had gone, he had won every trick.

Ned made his way back to the abode of the woman whose identity he had been enabled to assume under cover of the darkness.

Our hero did not care whether François followed him or not. He had given the Corsican one pill for the night at least.

Our readers will remember that François, upon seeing the woman issue from the house, had exclaimed:

"I thought so!"

The woman also had ejaculated:

"I thought so!"

The latter remark fell from the lips of a man who knew his points.

Ned had concluded that François would lie in wait to follow the woman, and he had borrowed a little clothing from the madame, and had gone forth as a decoy.

The night being dark favored his plan, and also the fact that François expected the woman to come forth. The Corsican was not looking for a game, and he followed the woman on the strength of his belief, which had called for the remark we have quoted.

The detective had a purpose. He wished to lead the Corsican away, so that he could not follow the real trail, and he had succeeded.

Ned reached the house, but learned that the woman had not returned. He strolled away through the neighborhood to await her return.

He had changed his disguise once more, being anxious to interview the woman undisturbed.

It was far into the night when the woman returned.

Ned followed her into her house.

"You are here," said the woman.

"Yes, like your shadow, I am here. What success have you met with, my good woman?"

"You have forgotten your lesson."

"How?"

"Gold."

"Ah, I understand! hold out your hand!"

The woman held out her hand, and Ned dropped into it several gold pieces.

"Now you have earned my sympathy," said the cunning woman.

"Have I, indeed?"

"Yes."

"Well, give me your information."

"I found an empty dovecote."

"Ah, the bird has flown!"

"Yes."

"Did you find out whether she had gone south or north?"

"I could not find out anything."

"Did you try?"

"I did."

"And you have received my gold."

"I am a woman. I have nothing to spare."

"But you should only receive what you earn."

"Do you think I have not earned what you have given me?"

"So far you have not earned the money."

"Shall I return it, monsieur?"

"No."

"Good! you are a true man. I told you I had nothing to spare. I could not *buy information*. Money goes a great way in France. You have money to spare. You may succeed where I failed."

"Thank you. I understand."

"I thought you would."

"Where will I find the empty cote?"

"The woman was a gay creature."

"And her name?"

"Panetta."

"Jane or Louisa?"

"Amalie Panetta."

"Good! Now, then, where did this Amalie Panetta reside?"

The woman gave our hero a certain direction, and he went forth to hunt down the gay creature, Amalie Panetta.

The fact that the creature had suddenly changed her abode was significant in itself, and Ned did hope that, at last, he had struck the right trail.

The fact was our hero was becoming wearied. His life for a year past had been nothing but a continuous search for missing beauties; to himself he remarked:

"I appear to have a special mission for looking up lost gals, and I'd like to switch off and run down a few first-class robbers once more."

Thinking matters over in his mind, he reached the house which the woman had occupied, and a few francs given to the porter gave him admittance to the apartment.

The rooms were bare, but it was evident at a glance that they had been gorgeously furnished.

Ned made a thorough search, but found nothing to reward his scrutiny. He was about to leave the place, when his keen eyes were attracted to the edge of a little piece of pasteboard which protruded from under the surbase.

Taking his knife, the detective dug the paper out, and lo! he had found a *carte de visite*.

"By ginger!" he exclaimed. "Here we are!"

It was the face of a handsome woman, a creature who was evidently bold enough to engage in any sort of criminal business.

Ned left the apartment and went down to the office of the porter.

"I reckon," he said, "that I must have got into the wrong apartment."

"Those were the apartments recently occupied by the Mademoiselle Panetta," was the reply.

"Not the mademoiselle I am looking for."

"That I do not know."

"This is the lady I am looking for," and Ned showed the photograph.

"That is the mademoiselle's picture," came the prompt answer.

"The mademoiselle who occupied the rooms?"

"Yes."

"That is strange!"

"What is strange?"

"That I should have made such a mistake."

"What mistake have you made?"

"The mademoiselle promised to leave a note telling me where she would go when she left here."

"And did you not find the note?"

"No."

"I can not help you."

"You do not know to which quarter of the city she has removed?"

"I do not."

Ned tossed the old man a gold piece, and said:

"Will that help your memory?"

"No; but I will tell you where you may find the mademoiselle."

"Where?"

"At the masked ball."

"Where is there to be a masked ball?"

"There is a masked ball every evening."

"Where?"

The man named a place in one of the lowest quarters of the city.

Ned looked at his watch.

"The ball will be closed at this hour."

"No; not until daylight. It is an all-night dance."

CHAPTER XC.

NED went forth determined to go to the all-night dance.

He changed his appearance for the purpose, and soon reached the place. He had little difficulty in gaining admission.

We will not attempt to describe the scene. A mask ball in France is little different from the same sort of dance in America, and about the same class of people attend them.

They dance the same, dress the same, laugh and talk the same, and in all manners it is similar, save that the conversation is carried on in French instead of English.

Ned was just a jolly fellow. He liked a dance, and, indeed, enjoyed a jollification of any sort; and as everything was free-and-easy in the place, he just pitched in to have some sport, determined to depend upon time or some accident, to reveal to him the identity of the original of the *carte de visite* he carried in his coat pocket.

In France, as in some large cities of America, people of the *richer* classes sometimes attend these mask balls, merely for the purpose of seeing how they are conducted; others go there because of the free-and-easy conduct of affairs. Hence the masks to enable such to attend incognito, as from the class mentioned comes the principal revenue for the support of the fandango.

It was not time, but an incident, that revealed to Ned the identity of the incognita he was looking for in that place.

Ned was a dancer, after a fashion, and soon selected a lady whom he saw swinging around on the floor, as a prospective companion.

During an intermission between the dances, he went forward and requested her company as a partner.

He spoke in English. He had a purpose in so doing.

The answer came in French.

"I do not speak English."

Ned was not at all disconcerted. He had not supposed she did speak English, but he desired to let her know that he did, and he put his question in French.

His invitation was immediately accepted with delight.

A French girl at a mask ball in Paris is always delighted to dance with an Englishman or an American.

Ned sat beside the fair mademoiselle, whose face was concealed behind a dainty mask, and engaged her in conversation.

Only a few moments passed, when a fierce-looking fellow came and addressed the lady; while doing so the man scowled at Ned.

Ned noticed the scowl, and mentally ejaculated: "Here's a row! That fellow is jealous! Well, well, I'm an accommodating sort of a Yankee, and in good time he shall have all the row he wants!"

The American had an idea that all other little devices failing, a shindy might facilitate the purpose of his visit to the mask ball.

The two spoke in Italian, and Ned could only discern that they were speaking quite tartly to each other, and he surmised that he was the occasion of the tartness.

"Let them be tart!" was his mental ejaculation.

The man cast one more scowling look at the lady's companion and went away.

"What is the matter with that fellow?" demanded Ned. "He appears to be mad at you."

"He is."

"What is the matter?"

"He is jealous."

"Oh, he is jealous," said Ned, innocently.

"Yes."

"I had better go away."

"No, no, we will dance."

The music had just struck up, and Ned and his incognita were now on the floor.

They danced away right merrily, and Ned, at the conclusion of the jolly go-round, invited the mademoiselle to go to the *café*, which is always an adjunct of the ball-room, as the bar is in American and English cities.

The mademoiselle was delighted to take wine with the American.

"How do you know I am an American?"

"Oh, I know you are."

They were seated at their little stand, when Ned suddenly, with great boldness, raised the lady's mask.

"Aha," he said, "I have hit it!" He did not speak out, however, his remark was "*in his mind*."

"Where do you live?" asked Ned.

"You are very rude!"

"Why?"

"You raised my mask."

"Oh, but you must excuse me! I knew you were beautiful, and I took a stranger's privilege."

"I am offended."

"You must not be."

"But I am."

"This is terrible, that I should have offended you just at the moment when I am so charmed!"

"You are a flatterer."

"Oh, no; it is not flattery to tell a charming lady that she has charmed a friend."

"You are quite a cavalier for an American."

"I was born a cavalier."

"I thought you were an American."

"Yes; and all Americans are cavaliers. I am the Duke of Yankeedom."

As the lady did not understand English, the American's assumed title sounded like a very high patent of nobility.

"I did not know they had noblemen in America."

"Oh, yes; the descendants of the old cavalier settlers of America still retain their titles. My title makes me eligible to the Presidency of the United States," said Ned.

The above may sound as extremely ludicrous to our readers, but when they remember the ignorance of the average Euproean as to the social condition of people in the United States, they will perceive that Ned's statements were delightfully confusing, if not really convincing.

"Then you are an American duke?"

"I am the Duke of Yankeedom, and I have a right, when I choose, to claim my title against all the world."

"You are a charming cavalier."

"Oh, you are seeking to make fun of me now?"

"No, I am in earnest."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Then you will tell me where you reside?"

"Why should I, monsieur?"

"I will call on you; I know you have come to this place merely from a love of fun and intrigue; you can not deceive me, I have penetrated your disguise."

"Oh, dear me, how discerning you are."

"It requires no great exercise of discernment to make the discovery, you can not disguise your manners, and they are too naturally *distingué* not to be apparent; yes, you are betrayed."

"Really, you are a charming man. I must tell you where I reside."

CHAPTER XCI.

NED was working up his little game quite cleverly, and to the woman's declaration he said:

"Please do."

The lady gave her address, and Ned had but just time to note it, when the man who had scowled at him before, came stalking into the room.

To himself Ned remarked as he saw the fellow coming:

"Now the row commences. I feel in my bones that I am about to have a 'turn.' Well. 'Lay on, Macduff, and —— be he who first cries hold, enough!'"

The American had been growing rusty. He had not enjoyed a good old swing around for about fifteen hours, and that was a pretty long time for him to go without a little violent exercise.

The jealous lover exchanged a few words with the lady, and they were sharp as before.

Ned sat by as innocent as a lamb, until the man addressed him directly.

The fellow leaned over, brought his lips close to Ned's ear, and said:

"You are an American?"

"I am."

"Leave here; you are in danger."

The man spoke in French. All Italians who reside in France awhile speedily acquire the language, owing to the similarity existing between the two tongues.

"I am in danger?" queried Ned.

"You are."

"Ah, that's excellent! I enjoy danger."

"You may be killed."

"Well, now, that would be too jolly for anything!" retorted Ned, in a tone of rare innocence.

The Italian gazed at our hero in amazement.

"Do you understand me?" he said.

"Perfectly."

"And you will remain?"

"Certainly."

"You have been warned."

"I have; but an American never deserts a lady in peril."

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"My meaning is plain enough. I never desert a lady in peril."

"What lady is in peril?"

"From the appearance of your ugly face, I should judge the lady at my side was in peril, and I shall remain here to protect her."

"You are very gallant," said the man, as a malignant look shot into his eyes.

"Yes."

"You are very brave."

"Yes. Under the circumstances I consider the lady in peril; and, as she is under my protection, I shall look out for her."

"You will leave."

"When?"

"Now."

"Oh, no; I am not ready to leave."

The lady reached over, and whispered to Ned:

"Do not provoke a quarrel. The monsieur is a violent man. You go, and call and see me."

"Thank you," returned Ned; "but I am not ready to go."

"The man is very violent. He may do you some harm."

"Is he very violent?"

"Very."

"All the better; I like violent men."

The woman gazed at Ned with an expression of amazement upon her countenance.

The idea began to creep over her that she had fallen into the company of a madman. She was ignorant of America, but the last bit of raillery was putting it on a little too thick, even for her.

"Do go," she said. "He will quarrel with you!"

"He has already quarreled with you, and that is the reason I am going to remain to protect you."

"I need no protection. Please go; a quarrel would be very annoying to me."

"But pleasant to me, mademoiselle. I love quarreling."

"No, no; please go! See, the monsieur is getting exceedingly angry."

The monsieur was really getting very angry, and the fact of the whispered conversation did not tend to allay his rising wrath. Raising his hand in an imperative manner, he motioned to Ned to go.

Old Ironsides laughed. In his mind, probably, he pictured the surprise the Italian was to be treated to in just about three American minutes by a Waltham watch.

The laugh irritated the fellow still more, and he suddenly drew a dagger. He had no intention of using the weapon; it was merely shown as a menace, but it was sufficient to arouse old Thunder-and-Lightning.

Ned leaped to his feet, and as the American reached his feet the Italian left his pedals.

The detective had let out, and had caught his man a terrible thump square on his protruding forehead.

It is a serious thing to strike a man in France; the laws are very strict, and especially are they so when a foreigner strikes a Frenchman. It's six months, dead sure, and no show for a lesser sentence; consequently, a blow causes considerable excitement, even more than a rough-and-tumble, knock-down-and-no-let-up scrimmage would in either England or America.

The dancing ceased, and a lot of infuriated Frenchmen crowded around our hero.

The lady in the case caught Ned by the arm and exclaimed:

"Run, monsieur, they will kill you!"

Meantime, Ned gained the stairs, passed down and out.

CHAPTER XCII.

As Old Ironsides reached the street he heaved a relieved sigh, and muttered:

"Well, I feel better now!"

There was a rush and excitement, but the Yankee, chameleon-like, had changed his colors. The man who joined in the crowd as a looker-on bore no resemblance to the man who had indulged in the merry pastime of throwing wild Frenchmen around a ball-room.

The American remained in the crowd, simply because he was anxious to wait and see the mademoiselle come forth. He had a purpose when he had his "turn." He wished to break up the ball simply because he desired to see the mademoiselle go home. He desired to make sure that she had not told him falsely, when she gave him the address to her residence.

He had succeeded in his purpose.

The police must do something for the honor and glory of the municipality which they served, and they broke up the dance, to the great disgust of the man who ran the affair.

There was no recourse, however; the police said. "End the dance;" and ended it was at once.

Ned hung round and soon saw the lady come forth. She was accompanied by the man whom our hero had keeled over.

"I reckon," said Ned, "I'll have to give that fellow another toss."

The lady and man walked along, and the American wondered they did not take a cab. He stole after them and learned that they were keeping up their quarrel.

The detective had changed his appearance, and so perfect was his change that they would not have recognized him had he come face to face with them.

The two walked toward the quarter where the woman had told Ned she resided, and they soon came to a halt, their quarrel having grown quite violent.

Ned walked straight up to them and stood impudently listening to their talk. As it was in Italian, he did not understand them, but their gestures betrayed its general purport.

The man saw Ned standing by, and forgetting the knock-down he had received, he was prepared for another fight. He was a fiery customer.

He advanced to Ned and demanded:

"What are you standing there for, monsieur?"

"It's the public street!" was the reply.

"You had better proceed on your way."

"Oh, no; I am in no hurry."

"Go."

"And leave you to abuse the lady?"

"When the lady needs your protection she will call upon you."

"She has called upon me."

"You are a falsifier!"

"Be careful. I will not have my word doubted."

Ned had observed that the lady had been trying to rid herself of her companion. He had managed to make out that much from her gestures.

"It's for you to be careful!" exclaimed the Italian.

"The lady does not desire your company. Why do you not leave her to proceed alone?"

The Italian became furious.

Ned just wanted him to get mad.

To the lady Ned said:

"Mademoiselle, go upon your way. I will see that this impudent fellow does not force his company upon you."

The Italian did not wait for further provocation, but sprung upon our hero, striking at him with his cane.

The scene occurred in front of a café. Ned remembered how he had once gotten rid of one of the Salaberts, and on the instant he determined to come the same game, hoping that it would prove an effectual method for detaining the wild Italian.

For Ned to conclude was to act, and away went the fiery Italian crashing through the window of the *café*.

The woman at once started and ran. There were many reasons why she did not wish to remain.

Ned walked off more leisurely, but he kept the woman in sight, and saw her enter a house not far distant from the scene of the Italian's misfortune.

Meantime, the Italian was in a jolly old row. He had gone pitching into the saloon through the window, head first; and, by a singular ocular delusion, one of the customers was led to believe that the man had madly jumped through.

The customer's immediate statement to that effect was believed, as, upon rushing to the street no one was seen.

The proprietor of the place seized the crazy man as he considered him, and, when accused of jumping through the window, the Italian did become crazy. He raved and tore and frothed at the mouth. A policeman was sent for, and the raving, tearing mad leapist was led off without ceremony to the lock-up, with the prospect of having to pay for the broken *café* window in the morning.

Meantime, Ned had tracked his incognita. He followed her to the house, entered a moment after her, and, guided by her footfalls, went to the very apartment where she entered.

As private houses are like flat houses in America, the hall-ways being public thoroughfares, Ned could easily follow the trail as described.

Ned rapped at the door just as it was closed. The woman opened it and stood over the threshold with a frightened look upon her face.

She beheld the man who had knocked down her companion a few moments previously. She did not scream; she was too old an *intrigeante* to cry out upon the moment.

In trembling tones, she demanded:

"What do you want?"

"I want to come in."

"Go away."

Ned attempted to push her back, but the woman resisted, and said:

"If you attempt to enter, I will summon help."

"You need no help, you invited me to come here."

"I invited you to come here?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"This very night."

"Who are you?"

"The Duke of Yankeedom."

The woman scanned our hero intently a moment, and answered:

"I think I know who you are."

"Well?"

"You can not enter my apartment. I have commanded you to go away."

"But I am here upon your invitation."

"You do not know who you are trifling with.

"Oh, yes, I know."

"Who am I?" demanded the woman.

"You are Amalie Panetta."

"And I know who you are, monsieur."

"Well, we will stand square—who am I?"

"The terrible American!"

CHAPTER XCIII.

"You have hit it exactly, and as now we know we are acquainted, open the door."

"I have no business with you."

"But I have with you."

"Does the monsieur remember that the police are on his track?"

"Yes; and I have thrown several of them off the track, and I will toss some more if necessary. But are you aware, madame, that the police are on your track?"

The woman exhibited signs of excessive fear.

"The police are on my track?"

"Yes."

"Why should the police trail me?"

"They want you to explain your intimacy with a man who was known as Altinni, but whose real name was Ricetti."

"I know no such man."

"You can well say that, since he is dead, but you did know him."

"Only by reputation."

"Come, come, Amalie; in one sense accounts are even up between us. Let me enter your rooms and have a quiet talk with you."

"Talk where you stand."

"No; I am tired, I wish to sit down."

"I will bring you a chair."

"Do so."

The woman would have closed the door, but Ned was out of patience and he forced the door open, pushed the woman back and entered the room, closing the door behind him.

"There," he said, coolly, "it's all right now."

"You are a very bold man! You may go too far, however. I am not as helpless as you may think, monsieur."

"You are not in any danger from me. I only desire to have a little talk with you."

"You came to the mask ball to find me?"

"I did."

"You were following me to my home?"

"I was."

"What is the purpose of this espionage?"

"Ricetti confided a young lady to your care. Where is she?"

"It's false!" almost screamed the woman.

Her agitation settled the matter in Ned's mind. He had struck the burrow at last.

"Madame, it's useless for you to deny the fact. I had the information from Ricetti. He was leading me to your former home when he met with his death."

"Did you kill him?"

"No."

"You know who did the deed?"

"I can name the man, I reckon."

"Ricetti told you he had confided a lady to my keeping?"

"He did."

"If Ricetti told you as you state it, he lied to you; or you speak falsely when you say he so told you."

"I expected you would deny it, madame."

"Why, monsieur? It was the cause of a quarrel between Ricetti and myself. I demanded to know where the girl was, and he would not tell me."

"By ginger!" quickly ejaculated Ned.

The detective, on the instant, was led to believe that the woman spoke the truth.

"I would have given much to have found the girl."

"Why?"

"That is a woman's secret. But I would have killed her!"

There was a savage and malignant gleam in the woman's eye, which appeared to confirm her declaration.

"You solemnly declare that you do not know where the girl is concealed?"

"I solemnly swear I do not!"

"Great codfish!" exclaimed Ned. "Here is a go! I am all at sea once more!"

"Madame," he said, "why did you change your residence?"

"Simply because I had been a friend of Altinni."

"Why should your friendship cause the change?"

"French law is very peculiar. French detectives are very thorough. I did not wish to be deprived of my liberty."

"But could not the police have traced you?"

"As you appear to have traced me, the chances are the police may have done so."

"Are you poor or rich?"

"I am poor."

"You would like to earn some money?"

"I would."

"You can aid me to find the girl?"

"I might aid you."

"If you assist me, and we are successful, you shall be well paid."

"Suppose the girl is dead?"

"I will pay you just the same if we establish the facts."

"How much?"

"According to the service you render."

"I will aid."

"Good!"

"I can do nothing at this hour."

"Well?"

"Come here to-morrow."

"And then—"

"I will try and assist you."

Ned went away. He determined to return to his lodgings. He had an idea that the woman would prove of great service to him.

Ned was walking along the street when he saw a man just ahead of him dodge behind one of those circular news-stands, to be seen on all sides in the city of Paris.

As Ned always went guarded, he slackened his pace. His object was to let the dodger know that he had been seen.

Ned came to a dead halt, and a moment later the man stepped from his cover and approached.

"That's all fair, my hearty!" thought Ned, as his hand fumbled with the butt of his pistol.

A moment, and the detective exclaimed:

"Kello, Peter, is that you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what news?"

"I have come to you for news."

"I am still at sea."

"You have found no clews?"

"I have found no clews."

"I fear my dear mistress is in the power of the Salaberts."

"I know better."

"They are making arrangements to leave Paris."

"They are making arrangements to leave Paris?"

"Yes."

"It's a blind, Peter. They will not leave Paris. But how did you discover the fact?"

"I have been in company with a man who is in their employ."

"Well, let them leave Paris. So long as we recover the mademoiselle we are all right."

"But their leaving Paris means something."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes. They are up to some game."

"They are always up to some game."

"I am surprised you do not recognize the significance of their movements."

"What do you think their movements imply?"

"That *my mistress is dead!*"

CHAPTER XCIV.

"Under some circumstances, Peter, I might join in your suspicion, but I have information that leads me to believe that the mademoiselle is safe."

"I trust your information is correct, but I fear that we have been beaten and outwitted."

"My good fellow, if I have been beaten and outwitted in this chase, I will make Paris my home for all time to come, and I would not exchange a plot of ground 25x100 in old plain Boston for all of magnificent Paris; meet me to-morrow afternoon, and I will have news for you, good news, I feel it in my bones."

Ned returned to his lodgings.

Upon the following morning our hero was interviewed by old man Rabe. The good old German opened his communication with the remark:

"I fear you have been tracked and identified."

"Ah, what makes you think so?"

"My apartments have been under surveillance for the last twenty four hours."

"Who is doing the 'piping'?"

"A porter."

"Very well, I am ready to meet Mr. Porter any time."

As matters turned Ned was destined to be taken at his word.

It was about noon when the American issued from his domicile. He had been upon the street but a few moments, when he became aware of the fact that he was being tracked by two men.

Our hero took no stock in the idea that the men who were "piping" him were genuine porters. He concluded at once that the Salaberts had run him to his lair, and were working some scheme against him.

It was an annoyance to be followed just at that moment, as Ned had determined to call upon Amalie Panetta.

While at home in his room the detective had enjoyed an opportunity to sit down and calmly think over his interview with the woman, and it had begun to dawn upon his mind that there was a possibility that the woman was, after all, only seeking to throw him off the trail.

The first duty Old Ironsides had on hand as a morning job was the throwing of the two porters off his trail, and, in order to succeed, he felt it necessary to give them a little loose rope.

Ned walked out toward the Bois de Boulogne, and soon had the satisfaction of discovering that he was being followed.

"Come along, my hearties," he remarked to himself. "I'll just let you lads into a genuine little Yankee trick."

Ned went toward the Bois simply for the purpose of leading the men a long distance away from the place where he was to meet Amalie Panetta.

Once in the park, Ned walked off to a deserted and remote quarter. The men followed him, and, at length, Old-change-his-clothes reached a point suitable for his purpose. He struck through a clump of woods; one man went into the wood, another man came out; and the man who came out was a very different-looking man from the fellow who had gone in.

The changed man took a seat on a bench near to the spot where he had issued from the clump of trees. He produced a book, and was reading as innocently as a lamb or a college professor, when he saw the men come through and emerge at the same outlet through which he had passed a moment previously.

The two men were dumfounded.

They were dead beat.

They looked all around and then into each other's faces.

The American enjoyed the incident. He had seen men bewildered before, but he took special enjoyment upon this occasion.

The men consulted a moment and then separated; they ran around the clump of trees in every direction like two dogs seeking the burrow of a fox.

"Keep it up, my hearties, and you will find him," muttered Ned.

The men did keep it up for some time, but at length appeared to come to the conclusion that their man had verily vanished into the air.

All this time the detective had appeared to be innocently engaged in reading his book.

The men came toward him.

Ned continued to read until a question was addressed to him.

"Did you see a man around here?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"A few moments."

"Where did he go?"

"There were two of them," said Ned, in an absent manner.

"Two men?"

"Yes."

"You saw them?"

"Yes."

"What were they doing?"

"I didn't notice particularly, I think they were running around that clump of bushes there."

The two men looked bewildered.

Ned spoke in a serious tone, but in an absent-minded sort of manner.

"What did the men look like?"

Ned scanned the two men before him, and quietly remarked:

"Well, you must excuse me, but really you were the two men I saw."

"Did you see no one else?"

"Let me see; it does strike me that I saw a man who did not look like either of you."

The men were eager.

"When did you see him?"

"If I saw him at all, it was just a moment before I saw you."

"Which way did he go?"

"He walked off across the lawn."

It was an open space for a thousand yards. The two porters were completely confused.

"Was the man a thief?" asked Ned.

"Worse."

"Ah! a highwayman?"

"A murderer!"

"Indeed!"

"He was; and now I think you can give us some information if you are inclined."

"I can give you no information."

"Then we will be compelled to arrest you."

"Arrest me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why should you arrest me?"

"Because you are unwilling to give us all the information you can."

"You two gentlemen should have as much information as myself; you came from the bushes only a moment after the man, and he walked off right before your eyes."

The two porters held a moment's conversation in a low tone, when both stepped forward and put their hands on Ned's shoulder, and one of them said:

"*You are our man!*"

CHAPTER XCV.

The situation had suddenly become quite interesting. Ned had played his trick well, but as matters shaped themselves it did not avail him.

"You have no right to arrest me!" he said.

"We take the right!"

"Have you a warrant?"

"We need no warrant."

"You must have a warrant before you can take me!"

"Come!"

"Not to-day, gentlemen, not to-day, some other time!"

The two men sought to lay violent hands on the American, and the war commenced.

Ned leaped to his feet, and shook the two men off, as a dog shakes the water from his coat, when emerging from the river.

"Dare you resist?"

"You are two robbers! you can not rob me. I will defend myself!"

"We are officers!"

"Of the army?" demanded Ned, in an innocent tone.

"Police."

"Prove it to me!"

"Come with us and we will prove it!"

"Why should I go with you for the proof? You run and get the proof and bring it here," said Ned, as cool as a cucumber.

"We can not waste time with you."

"Well, you are wasting time, so clear out!"

"Will you resist?"

"Certainly."

The men made a movement to draw their weapons. Ned, however, was ahead of them. His old sockdolager, in the shape of his locust, was jerked out; it cut the air, and the porters both lay down. They had no choice in the matter.

Ned had dealt pretty hard blows, and the men were compelled to lie a moment to *rest their heads*. The detective improved the opportunity to leave. He walked over to the clump of trees, and the moment he was under cover he ran. He soon struck a narrow path, along which he sped like the wind. He was a good runner, and in fifteen minutes issued from the Bois, and, hopping into a cab, was driven to the city.

When the two porters recovered from their brief naps one of them groaned:

"It was the terrible American!"

It was too late to follow. The fellows had overslept themselves.

Ned left the cab at the Place de la Concorde, and started afoot, and managed to reach the house of Amalie Panetta at the very moment appointed for their meeting.

He rapped at the door, but there came no response. He rapped again in a violent manner; still no response.

The detective opened the door; the operation was an easy one for him.

He discovered what he had suspected the moment he had first rapped; the room was deserted.

"Ah, she has played me false!"

Ned looked around the rooms, and at length his eyes fell upon a little note lying upon the table.

Ned opened the note, and read as follows:

"Monsieur,—Permit me to bid you adieu; you are a charming man; indeed, I have found you such a rare fascinator, I have been impelled to fly from your presence. I will take good care this time that you do not find me. I leave Paris. I promised you some information for which you were to pay. I give you the information, but you can keep your francs; you can give over your search for Mademoiselle *Emily Salabert!* She is dead!

"Yours, A. P—."

Woman-like, Mme A. P— had given herself dead away. She had *given the name of the missing girl.*

The fact was sufficient, it betrayed her secret.

"So I need not look for you, eh?" muttered Ned. "Well, my beauty, I will look for you, and I will find you, too, much sooner than you expect."

Old Ironsides had a clear trail. He knew the party he was looking for, and stood on the ground from whence she had made her start; that was enough for him. He was just the man to get his game under the above conditions *every time*; indeed, it was to him but an easy task, one which required no assistance.

While in the rooms, Ned thought he would just take a peep around. He was a keen peeper, and his peep upon the occasion met with a wonderful reward.

Ned had been in Paris long enough to know something of the lay of a Paris apartment, and he soon poked his nose into a little off room which few would have come upon Once in the room, and the great mystery was solved.

The woman had really lied to him. At the very moment when she had been denying all knowledge of the girl the fair Emily was not fifty feet away.

"I reckon I'm getting into my dotage," said Ned; "the fact is," he added, "I should have searched this room last night, and I would have been ready to start for America in about a week."

The detective had discovered unmistakable evidence of the presence of Emily Salabert.

"Well, I am an old fool!" he muttered, "but, by ginger, I'll make up for my oversight!"

He went down-stairs and interviewed the sleeping janitor. He did not expect to get much information from that functionary, and he was not disappointed.

There must have been a cabman, but there were eleven thousand cabs in Paris, and while he was going among them the woman Panetta could accomplish a good deal of mischief.

Ned concluded to hang around the house awhile. He understood human nature pretty well, and, when a lad, had trapped many a rabbit.

Old Ironsides was prepared for more active measures when the time came, but at the moment he determined to try for awhile the virtue of a good wait.

He did not have to wait as long as he had anticipated. In about half an hour he exclaimed:

"By ginger! I thought so, madame, you are doing it well; but you never ought to have come sneaking around here in any guise when the Duke of Yankeedom is on your track!"

The detective had struck his big clew much sooner than he had hoped.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE detective had wrought one of his wonderful changes in his personal appearance, and had just lain around loose, and while thus lying around he saw an old woman come along with a basket filled with fruit and vegetables.

It would have been all right. The woman was got up magnificently—cute enough to have fooled even Rideau—but she did not attend to business, she did not solicit trade.

It was this latter fact which had first attracted the attention of the keen-eyed detective; and when he once set to "pipe" the old market-woman, he noticed that her attention was directed everywhere save toward the sale of her goods. She glanced around warily, as though expecting to see some one, and her eyes studied the various people who came from the building that had once been occupied by Amalie Panetta.

"I reckon we will just take it easy now," said Ned, and a broad smile overspread his bronzed face.

Had the woman caught a sudden glimpse of his face her suspicions would have been aroused, as the smile upon the American's face was what is termed, figuratively, a "speaking one."

The woman passed and repassed the passage leading to the court, and at length she entered, and Ned saw her hold a few moments' conversation with the janitor.

At length she came forth and moved away.

Ned followed. He saw her enter a little fruit shop, and some ten minutes later a veiled woman came forth.

The detective followed the veiled woman, and as he started upon her track, he muttered:

"Very good, very good. She did it well; got herself up true to nature, but it was of no use after all, as against his Highness the Earl of Yankeedom!"

Ned saw the woman go to the railroad station, the Lyons station. He was at her side when she purchased a ticket for Fontainebleau, and he a moment later bought a ticket for the same historic town, situated about thirty-seven miles from the city of Paris.

Ned saw his quarry get on the train, but he did not take a seat in his own compartment until the last moment, and then he kept his head protruded to see that no passenger got off before the train started. He had his game well on, and was determined to return with some one in his company on his home trip.

There was no doubt in his mind as to the result of his involuntary excursion to the splendid palace, which for centuries had been the home of the kings and emperors of France.

At every station Ned was on the lookout that the veiled passenger in a forward compartment did not skip the ranch.

After two hours' run the train came to a halt at the Fontainebleau station.

Our hero saw the woman descend from the car and enter a stage, and he took a seat in one of the other stages.

He was the only passenger in the vehicle he had chosen, and a couple of minutes passed when he saw the stage containing the woman as a passenger start.

All the stages followed the same route along the beautiful avenue that leads to the city.

At the verge of the town the lady alighted, and a moment later our hero also skipped his vehicle.

The woman took her path along a narrow street, and soon passed beyond the limits of the town, following a country road.

Ned followed, and at length had the pleasure of seeing the woman enter a house which stood back from the street, surrounded like the majority of the country houses in France by a high stone garden wall.

"So far so good," was the comment of Old Ironsides, as he saw the woman enter the house.

He had lain well back on his trail so as not to be seen following his game.

He knew that the woman was cunning and suspicious, and would have taken the alarm had she seen a stranger.

Having run a good chase, Ned sat down beside the road to consider his next move.

There were reasons why he did not desire to rush right in on the woman. He concluded to wait until nightfall.

There were many reasons that governed his decision. He did not wish to come in conflict with the police, and he did not know to what expedients the woman, in a moment of desperation, might resort.

Our hero was a sort of an outlaw already, and prudence demanded that he should go slow.

He was a patient and enduring chap, so he just crawled around close to the house, hid himself in the bushes, and, like Wellington at Waterloo, longed for night.

Darkness at length shadowed hill and dale; our hero saw the glimmer of lights through the windows of surrounding residences, and was content.

At about eight o'clock he prepared to move.

He had kept his eyes all the afternoon on the house. He had seen the woman enter; but not one single sign of life had he beheld since she had disappeared across the threshold.

When night came he crawled from his place of concealment, and approached the house.

A light had just been struck, and glancing in through the window, Ned saw a sight that filled his great old heart with joy.

The woman was preparing a meal, preparing it to carry to another party, and the detective did not think twice in coming to the conclusion as to the identity of the party for whom the meal was being prepared.

The woman left the room, carrying quite a nice meal on a tray.

Ned's opportunity had arrived. He stole into the house. He had but little difficulty in effecting an entrance.

Once in the house, he calmly seated himself at a table and awaited the woman's return.

"By ginger!" was his mental ejaculation as he sat there. "Won't that old girl look surprised when she sees me here!"

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE detective certainly had good reason to suppose that the woman really would look surprised upon seeing him there.

Fully half an hour passed when he heard steps upon the stairs.

"Oho! she comes!" he muttered, and the old speaking smile played over his face.

A moment and the door opened, and there followed a scene.

A scream rang through the house, there came a crash, and a woman staggered backward with a face like death.

"Good-evening," with the utmost coolness remarked the detective.

The scream had come from Mme. Panetta, when she first discovered the presence of our hero, and the crash had followed when she dropped the tray of empty dishes which she was carrying from the upper room.

"Who are you?" demanded the woman the moment she gained power to speak.

"Oh, you do not remember me, eh?"

The woman glared. It was evident she suspected the identity of her strange visitor.

"Are you not ready to welcome the Duke of Yankeedom?"

"I am!" exclaimed the woman, suddenly, and she sprung across the room.

Well, now a woman was certainly out of her head when she had an idea that she could injure Old Ironsides with an Italian stiletto.

In about two seconds the furious madame had resumed her seat disarmed. Ned also sat down. He had come to take matters easy, and he was determined to do so.

"You know well enough why I am here! Your game is up, madame!"

"I have no game. I do not understand you. I have come to this house to escape your persecutions."

"Oh, you were very considerate of yourself; but how about the young lady whom you brought here with you to escape my persecutions as well?"

"I know of no young lady. Are you still indulging that fancy?"

"Listen; you are too smart a woman to think for one moment that you can fool me!"

"I have no intention of fooling you."

"That is right. Now you talk like a sensible woman."

"You can not remain in this house, sir!"

"You would not refuse shelter for one night to a duke, would you, madame?"

"You must leave this house!"

"I must, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am prepared to leave, but I shall not go alone; and you know as well as I do, that I will not!"

"Do you mean to attempt to compel me to go with you?"

"Oh, no; I've no particular desire for your company; but, madame, if you do not wish to visit a cemetery involuntarily, you will just throw up your hands and own up the truth."

"I've nothing to own up, and I will have you to know that I am not a lone and unprotected female."

"Oh, you are not?"

"I am not."

"Well, call in your re-enforcements, madame, for the enemy is about to move. I am going upstairs!"

"Never!"

"We march, madame!"

"Then it is across my dead body!"

"Oh, nonsense!"

Ned stepped across the room; the woman threw herself before him, when our hero suddenly caught her two wrists, and in a twinkling a pair of iron bracelets ornamented her really shapely arms.

The woman pursed her lips as though about to scream, when Ned said, in a decided tone:

"You attempt to scream, madame, and I will put a little gagger between your teeth!"

The woman wilted at last.

"Wait," she said.

"For what?"

"I have a proposition to make."

"Ah! have you, indeed?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's have your proposition."

"For a price I will lead you to where you can find the girl."

"It won't do. You might have made a bargain in Paris, but now it is too late. I have left my purse at home. But come, can I escort you upstairs?"

"I am to receive nothing?"

"Oh, yes. You are to receive permission to make yourself scarce, otherwise Rideau may desire a little information from you."

"It is your turn to-night; mine will come."

"Well, I do not feel just like having a 'turn,'" answered Ned; "but if I ever am taken with a 'fit' around here, I'll shake up your furniture a trifle, madame!"

The detective started up the stairs, and upon reaching the upper hall came to a halt.

A voice fell upon his ear, and Ned removed his hat and stood in an attitude of reverent silence.

It was the voice of a woman he heard, a sweet, sad voice, and it was being spent in a prayer for deliverance.

"Well," mentally ejaculated Ned, "for once in my life I really am just in time."

He stood and listened, and beckoned the woman to come up, but Mme. Panetta merely scowled.

The woman had planned well and skillfully, but in the end she had been beaten, and the victory and its golden fruits had passed from her grasp.

Ned abided at the door until the voice ceased, when he knocked.

There came no answer.

He rapped again, and still there came no answer.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "I dare not go in until I am summoned!"

He thought he would give an intimation that it was not a woman at the door, and he coughed, and at the same moment rapped once more.

A low cry of terror issued from the room.

"Why do you pursue me?

"By George!" muttered Ned, "this is awkward," but suddenly an idea struck him, and he called out:

"Open the door!"

He hoped Emily would recognize his voice.

There came no answer.

Once more he called out:

"Open the door! it is a friend who seeks admission!"

The door opened, and at last Old Ironsides and Emily Salabert once more stood face to face; the iron-willed detective had won at last.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

ONE wild glad cry fell from the lips of the beautiful, the magnificent Emily Salabert, and she threw herself into the arms of our hero!

"You have come to me!" she cried; "the cravens, they spoke falsely to me; they told me you were dead!"

Ned was too excited and overjoyed to feel foolish, otherwise the great-hearted man would have blushed like a girl at finding himself clasped in the arms of such rare beauty.

"They told you I was dead, did they? Well, hang 'em, there's a few of them who will never tell many more lies!"

The lovely woman hugged the American as though he had been—well, her big brother just returned from college after having taken all the honors.

"I am here," said Ned, after a moment, "and I have come to take you away with me!"

"They never could have held me a prisoner," returned Emily, "if they had not deceived me!"

"Ah! they did deceive you, eh?"

"They led me to believe you were dead."

"No, no, my sweet girl. I have been on the track of the villains who kept you a captive ever since the moment you first fell into their hands!"

"And where is Peter?"

"He is all right."

"Thank Heaven! and now take me from here!"

"Put on your duds!" said Ned, in English.

It did not take Emily long to array herself for a departure.

The Panetta woman came upstairs.

"Have I not treated you well, mademoiselle?" she inquired.

"Yes; you treated me well, but you deceived me."

"It was for your own good."

"How?"

"I would have kept you out of the hands of your enemies."

"Who do you call my enemies?"

"There is your worst enemy, and some day you will discover it!" and the woman pointed toward Ned.

"It is to the protection of this enemy I consign myself!" said Emily.

It chanced that there was a late train leaving Fontainebleau for Paris, and our hero secured a compartment, and in due time reached there with his fair charge.

On the way Emily told her story.

Part of the details our hero had already heard from Ricetti, and the man's statements were confirmed by Emily.

From the moment she had been taken from the subterranean vaults, she had been in charge of the Panetta woman.

The latter had managed to make the captive believe that she was a friend, and in flitting from place to place, had made Emily believe that they were flying from the Salaberts.

They had convinced her, in the first place, that the American had been killed, and from that moment she had trusted them; and it was not until the very night of her rescue that she had come to suspect that the woman was her foe.

"I tell you," she said, "I am a girl of some spirit, and if I had not been terrorized I would have freed myself from the woman Panetta."

"Yes, you are a brave girl," said Ned, encouragingly, and he gazed with a feeling of delight upon her handsome face, and the words of Ricetti were recalled to his mind, and the remembrance of that good, hearty hug he had received that very night.

Our hero took Emily direct to a hotel. He told her that there was no more need for her to hold herself in concealment.

"You can just bet that I will take pains to let the Salaberts know where you are!"

"Oh, do not!" she cried, in a terrified tone.

"It is best," he said. "They will be compelled to make open warfare, and when they do, they go down, that's all!"

There was no misunderstanding the significance of the detective's remark.

Leaving Emily at the hotel, Ned went out to look for Peter. He had an idea as to where he could find the faithful fellow, and he succeeded.

"Hallo, Peter," he demanded, when they met, "what news?"

"Strange news."

"Indeed."

"Yes."

"Well, out with it."

"The Salaberts have left Paris."

"They have, eh?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"They left this very evening."

"And where did they go?"

"To Italy."

"And what is their purpose?"

"Their movements confirm my words."

"And you are satisfied your mistress is dead?"

"I am."

"Well, it is easy to be mistaken."

"I shall not admit a mistake until I stand face to face with her!"

"You shall do that."

"Never again."

"I say, yes, this very night, this very hour."

The Indian's face fairly beamed.

"You have found her?"

"I have."

"She is safe?"

"She is."

"Then we must be up and doing."

"What do you mean? All danger is past; I propose to fight these men an open game. I shall appeal to the law afterward, to a law of my own making."

"It's too late, I fear."

"Explain yourself, my good friend."

"The Salaberts have left Paris with certificates of her death."

"Aha! that is the game, eh?"

"Under the will they will seize all the property, transform it into cash, and depart to other lands, leaving my mistress a beggar!"

"We will see about that," said Ned.

The Indian was made happy by once more beholding his beautiful mistress.

There followed a consultation, and Ned advised an immediate departure for Italy.

Upon the day following Peter, our hero, and Emily Salabert, all three properly disguised, started for the home of our fair heroine's father.

Ned's adventures in Paris were over. He had fought a big fight against big odds, and had won; but, as matters turned out, he only departed from Paris to encounter in Italy still more wonderful adventures than he had encountered in France; and should our readers so express a desire, in a future tale we will relate the story of the Giant Detective's adventures with the Italian brigands and other criminals.

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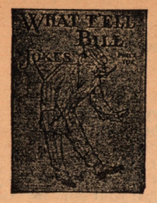

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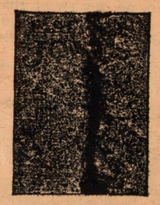

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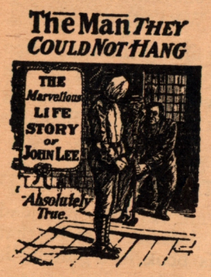

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